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ABSTRACT

This guide helps secondary students to understand the role of the rescuers of the Jews during the Holocaust. The rescuers included atheists, government bureaucrats, German soldiers, antisemites, devout Christians, and even German collaborators. The focus is on how people, both good and bad, react in times of stress and of the moral choices all people may have to face in their lives. The essays include: (1) "Using This Guide: A Word to Teachers about Classroom Approaches to Teaching about the Rescuers" (Allan H. Scholl); (2) "Who Are the 'Righteous among the Nations'?" (Joel S. Fishman); (3) "The Significance of Yad Vashem's 'Righteous' Program" (honoring non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews) (Mordecai Paldiel); (4) "The Process of Commemorating Deeds of Heroism" (Alex Grobman); (5) "The Impact of the Holocaust upon a Christian" (Harry James Cargas and Joel Fishman); (6) "'Righteous among the Nations': A Tool for Teaching Moral Development" (Efraim Zuroff); (7) "Sempo Sugihara, Who Dared To Save Lives" (Mordecai Paldiel); (8) "Keeping the Rescuers in Historical Perspective" (Alex Grobman); and (9) "New Insights on Holocaust Survivors and Their Helpers" (Dienke Hondius). Contains a selected bibliography. (EH)

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THOSE WHO DARED: RESCUERS AND RESCUED

A TEACHING GUIDE FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

by Alex Grobman, Ph D
Director, Martyrs Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust



MARTYRS MEMORIAL
AND MUSEUM OF THE HOLOCAUST
of The Jewish Federation

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USING THIS GUIDE: A WORD TO TEACHERS ABOUT CLASSROOM APPROACHES TO TEACHING ABOUT THE RESCUERS

by

Allan H. Scholl, Ph.D.

Chair, Education Committee

Martyrs Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust

Introduction

This teaching guide for secondary schools is about history—more specifically, about people who helped people during the Holocaust. It is also about how people, both good and bad, react in times of stress and about the moral choices we all may have to face sometime in our lives. It is also about the importance of ethics and values and what that means for those who teach young people today. As noted in the article by Efraim Zuroff, a central issue in studying the rescuers is that by comparing and contrasting the actions of both the “Righteous” and the perpetrators during the Holocaust we can begin to understand a great deal about the nature of human behavior.

Ultimately, the choices we make can prove critical in determining the outcome of an historical event. The lesson for students is, as Zuroff also points out, “that... every individual living in Europe at that time (during the Holocaust) had freedom of action and could choose between good, apathy and evil, but the Holocaust ultimately took place because the number of perpetrators by far surpassed the number of Righteous Among the Nations. And that is why tragedies happen and continue to happen to this day.”

For the student, this guide helps illuminate the story of the Holocaust, providing access to complex historical events by studying the lives of individuals such as the Japanese diplomat Sempo Sugihara who acted to help people in time of crisis. For teachers, the guide offers direction in assisting students to understand the connections between personal responsibility and individual action and between good and evil. It also demonstrates for students why critical thinking skills are important to the study of history.

Moral and ethical questions about why people do what they do in times of terrible events are matters of concern to all those who teach history-social science to young people. Understanding how and why such a dissimilar group of people—atheists, government bureaucrats, German soldiers, antisemites, devout Christians, and even German collaborators—could become rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, goes deeply to the heart of the whole range of human ethical values, a platform of values which is one of the foundations of the discipline of history and, indeed, of the full range of the social sciences and humanities.

Most history-social science curriculum frameworks stress the importance of applying ethical understanding to our daily decisions. Every grade level offers the history teacher ample opportunity to encourage students to reflect on the importance of individual responsibility and of the ethical implications of their decisions. Reading and using this guide offers reinforcement by assisting teachers in demonstrating these understandings to their students.

The Purpose of This Guide

This teaching guide provides comprehensive instructional guidance for secondary teachers who wish to teach about the causes of the Holocaust. The guide provides background and information about individuals known as the "Righteous Among the Nations", those who helped rescue individual Jews from the fate that ultimately engulfed millions of Jews in state-supported genocide during World War II.

Included are stories of how individuals reacted to the Holocaust and how they acted to help rescue Jews. There are stories about well-known figures such as the Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg and the German businessman Oskar Schindler, but also stories of lesser-known figures such as the Japanese diplomat Sempo Sugihara and the Swiss police official Paul Gr  ninger. There is material on the historical background to the Holocaust and on the "Righteous Among the Nations," and also information about the process by which rescuer's deeds of heroism have been commemorated.

The guide can be used to enrich courses in world, multicultural, and American history, Advanced Placement European History, Advanced Placement American History, psychology, sociology, humanities, and language arts.

How This Guide is Organized

This publication focuses on the rescuers of Jews and the rescued during the Holocaust. It consists of a group of articles, each written by a specialist in the subject. The articles are:

- Who are the "Righteous Among the Nations?"
- The Significance of Yad Vashem's "Righteous" Program

- The Process of Commemorating Deeds of Heroism
- The Impact of the Holocaust Upon a Christian
- Righteous Among the Nations: A Tool for Teaching Moral Development
- Sempo Sugihara, Who Dared to Save Lives
- Keeping the Rescuers in Historical Perspective
- New Insights on Holocaust Survivors and Their Helpers

Also included is a useful chart, Number of "Righteous Among the Nations" showing the number of rescuers identified in Europe by country during World War II and a Selected Bibliography of the topic.

Preparing to Teach About the "Righteous Among the Nations"

Teachers should prepare themselves by first reading the articles by Joel Fishman, Ph.D., "Who Are the Righteous Among the Nations?" and "Critical Issues Raised by the Rescuers" by Alex Grobman, Ph.D.; these provide appropriate historical background to the topic and also consider the critical issue of whether it is dangerous to inflate the historical importance of the rescuers at the expense of deflating the importance of the Holocaust itself. Next, read Efraim Zuroff's article, "Righteous Among the Nations: A Tool for Teaching Moral Development," and Drs. Dienke Hondius' article on teaching about helpers during the Holocaust, both of which raise fundamental and interesting questions about the major issues and the importance of teaching about the Holocaust today.

After reading these articles please read about the "Process of Commemorating Deeds of Heroism," by Alex Grobman, Ph.D., and the article by Mordecai Paldiel, Ph.D. on "The Significance of Yad Vashem's Righteous Program," for an understanding of the complex and interesting topic of how the "Righteous" are chosen and the meaning of the program. The biography of the Japanese diplomat Sempo Sugihara provides the teacher with a detailed life of one of the rescuers. Both sad and uplifting, the story of Sugihara's life serves to illustrate some of the critical issues raised by these other articles.

Representative Learning Objectives for Using This Guide

According to his or her present capacities, the student should grow in the ability to:

- Understand that there were Christians who risked their lives to save Jews.
- Learn about those who helped rescue Jews during the Holocaust and why they helped.
- Read and study about the life of Sempo Sugihara, as a way to understand the motivations of rescuers.
- Learn about the rescuers in the larger context of the Holocaust.
- Understand the process by which the "Righteous Among the Nations" are selected.

- Recognize that we all need to make ethical choices in our lives.
- Understand that personal decisions that disregard the value of human life or that tolerate barbarous practices are unethical.
- Learn to recognize the meaning of the term "moral dilemma."
- Acquire an understanding of the critical thinking skills of defining and clarifying problems, judging information, problem solving, and drawing conclusions based on objective information.
- Develop historical and ethical literacy.
- Recognize that the sanctity of life and the dignity of the individual are important to an understanding of what is ethical in life.
- Analyze the reasons why such diverse people as atheists, government bureaucrats, German soldiers, antisemites, devout Christians, and those who collaborated with the Germans could be rescuers of Jews.
- Learn that Western and non-Western societies historically developed religious and philosophical traditions that established certain ethical standards of human behavior and values.
- Recognize the connection between ideas and actions.
- In studying the Holocaust, learn that ideas have ethical implications.
- Understand the moral dilemmas faced by those who find themselves dealing with inhuman acts and who have to make decisions based on choices between ideology or ethical values.

Suggested Student Activities

The following activities can be used by the teacher as start-up activities and/or reinforcement activities when teaching about the topic of the rescuers and the rescued during the Holocaust:

1. Discuss the meaning of the terms "rescuer" and "rescued."
2. Assign selected students to go to the library and research the lives of rescuers such as Sempo Sugihara, Paul Grüninger, Oskar Schindler, Aristedes de Sousa Mendes, and Raoul Wallenberg. Have them present their findings in class.
3. Organize a classroom debate on the subject of "Would I Have Been a Rescuer During the Holocaust."
4. Lead the class through the process of evaluating whether or not someone should be chosen as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations."
5. Ask students to find out what role churches played in rescuing Jews during the Holocaust.
6. In a class discussion, pose the question of whether our values and ethics gives us no choice but to help prevent the loss of innocent lives regardless of the consequences to ourselves and our families.

7. Conduct a mock TV coverage of a Yad Vashem committee discussing the case of an individual for possible recognition of a rescuer as one of the "Righteous." Use actual case studies listed on pages 21-28 as examples.
8. Ask a selected student to read *The Deputy* by Rolf Hochuth and prepare a report to the class about it. How does he deal with the story of the SS officer Kurt Gerstein?
9. Look up and define the terms: ethics, values, atheist, antisemitism, collaborator, historical perspective, commemorate, "Righteous Among the Nations", Holocaust, historical perspective, SS, persecute, moral dilemma, criteria, rescuers, perpetrators, Yad Vashem, and heroism. Use each in a correct sentence.
10. Divide the class into cooperative learning groups and have them research the topic of rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. Have them present their findings in class.
11. Conduct research into the controversy over whether the Vatican, under the leadership of Pope Pius VI, could have done more to help rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Report the findings in class.
12. Have a student go to the library to find information about the rescue of the Jews of Denmark during World War II. Discuss the findings in class.
13. Ask a selected group of students to find out information about other rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust. Present the findings in class.
14. For an oral history, interview someone who has a story to tell about how he or she was rescued by a non-Jew during the Holocaust.
15. Compare the actions of the SS officer Kurt Gerstein with that of Raoul Wallenberg to analyze why one was accepted as one of the "Righteous Among the Nations" and the other's is still to be decided. Report to the class.
16. Compare and contrast the activities of a rescuer and perpetrator who operated in the same community. Discuss their motives, activities and the implications of their decisions.

WHO ARE THE "RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS?"

by Joel S. Fishman, Ph.D.
Historian

Historians trying to grasp the reality of the Second World War have identified new concepts and created a special terminology, breathing new meaning into old words.¹ Defined in the Talmud, the term "Righteous Gentile" originally applied to any non-Jew who accepted and carefully observed the seven Noahide Commandments: no murder, no fornication, no eating of live flesh, no stealing, no blasphemy, no idolatry, and the establishment of law courts. Such an individual would have a place in the World to Come.² The term "Righteous among the Nations," or "Righteous Gentile," has acquired new content, describing the heroism of those who rescued Jews in mortal danger in countries under Nazi domination. The subject is central because it enhances our understanding of the Holocaust and its historiography, Jewish-Gentile relations, the behavior of individuals and groups in defiance of authority, heroism, collaboration, and betrayal. Its appeal has been considerable, perhaps because the subject may be understood in simple human terms.

With the gradual accumulation and publication of new evidence, and the release of the powerful film *Schindler's List*, the contribution of Righteous Gentiles has commanded our admiration and assumed increasing prominence in our historical consciousness. The cumulative impact of new findings and fresh interpretation have improved our perception of this chapter of history. Ties of communication have opened with the demise of the Eastern Bloc, bringing a new wave of nominations of the Yad Vashem distinction. Survivors hasten to give testimony before they and their benefactors pass on. New facts continue to be discovered through testimony and access to new archives. To our amazement, our perception of the subject is constantly being revised and improved.

In context, we must comprehend that one of Hitler's highest priorities was the annihilation of the Jews. His war aims included not only the conquest of territory, but also the enslavement and ultimate obliteration of the Jewish people and the enslavement of those in territories under German

domination.³ Hitler's program of mass murder had such high priority that it was implemented with an "almost total disregard for political and economic consequences."⁴ In this light, we may understand why the "program of extermination reached its extreme phase even when Hitler must have realized that the war was irretrievably lost."⁵

Hitler's war against the Jews rejected the compassionate morality of Judaism and Christianity, showing no mercy for the weak, gassing the mentally retarded, breeding humans according to the principles of animal husbandry, and performing cruel medical experiments on people.⁶ Using the totalitarian apparatus of state and its efficient bureaucracy, Germany waged merciless war against the Jews and spurned conventionally accepted norms of human morality. Against the massive force of the criminal state—which at the outset of the war appeared to have victory assured—a small number of individuals risked their lives and the lives of their families in order to save Jews.

The circumstances vary from case to case. Generally, individuals did not seek out opportunities to rescue the persecuted but responded to desperate requests for aid. In proportion to the heavy losses of the Holocaust, the number of rescued is small, but the moral value of such acts of personal heroism, willingly or reluctantly performed, transcends statistics, particularly when we remember that Germany was waging a war against nations and the very existence of those nations. Whether motivated by altruism or by less-than-pure considerations, such acts grip our imagination in a way that cannot be explained rationally.

The historian endeavors to examine the past in order to understand it. Beyond the processes of classification and quantification, the workings of a far more elusive force must be explained: the human conscience. How the inner voice of the conscience influences behavior is a deep philosophical question and a mystery. Therefore, many rescuers later said: "I was doing only what I should have done; I would do it again;" or, "I am sorry that I could not have saved more." In fact, many have refused to accept honors and public recognition for their deeds. Miep Gies, friend and guardian of the Frank family in Amsterdam, wrote: "There is nothing special about me. I have never wanted special attention. I have been willing to do only what was asked of me and what seemed necessary at the time."⁷ It is primarily in this dimension that the behavior of such an unlikely group as the rescuers may be understood. They included professing Christians, confirmed antisemites, collaborators, atheists, bureaucrats, aristocrats, simple people, Germans in military service, and Japanese.

The Righteous Among the Nations do not fall into neat categories with regard to personality and background, the degree of will and decisiveness to act, or the kind of aid offered. As Judge Moshe Bejski, Chairman of Yad Vashem, wrote: "The Martyrs and Heroes Remembrance Law (Yad Vashem 5713-1953) did not provide an exact definition of who was worthy of the title of 'Righteous Among the Nations.' It merely mentioned the 'highminded Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews,' without defining who they were."

Moshe Bejski, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Committee for the Designation of the "Righteous Among the Nations," wrote: "Developing some expertise on the subject, the Yad Vashem Commission for Righteous Gentiles has established certain criteria for granting the title: (a) extending help in saving a life; (b) absence of reward, monetary or otherwise; and (c) similar considerations by which the rescuer's deeds stand out above beyond what can be termed as ordinary help." ⁸

According to Mordecai Paldiel, chair of the Commission for Righteous Gentiles at Yad Vashem, the basic criterion for the distinction is the degree of risk which the rescuer personally accepted.⁹ The decision to become personally involved in the rescue of Jews in a country under direct Nazi military or civilian administration carried serious personal risk, because the penalty could mean immediate execution or dispatch to a labor camp.¹⁰ This decision was made by free choice. According to Gesina van der Molen, a rescuer of Jewish children in the Netherlands, "One knew what one was getting into."¹¹ Because of the unsettled wartime conditions, we will never know the exact numbers of rescuers or of Jews saved. We know that by 1995, Yad Vashem awarded the distinction of Righteous Gentile to more than 13,000 individuals.¹² But statistics tell only part of the story. Not all cases have been reported. Partial or unsuccessful attempts at rescue have not been fully documented, nor do we have figures for the number of Jews (and rescuers) who might have survived had they not been betrayed.

Depending upon circumstances and geography, the process of rescue may have been either brief or prolonged, simple (the work of an individual) or complex (requiring the coordinated efforts of many over a long period of time). However the basic act of rescue, and probably the most dangerous, was hiding a Jew in one's own home. Judge Bejski wrote:

... while the Righteous came from all sectors of the population, the majority were from the lower classes. Poor people who had difficulty providing for their own families found it possible to share their meager fare with those whom they took under their protection ¹³

The greatest danger lay in hiding a Jew in one's own home, because there was constant danger of surprise searches. In countries where there was a greater willingness to hide Jews, the risk decreased, as it became possible to move Jews from place to place, as needed.¹⁴

Some rescuers' names may be familiar to the reader: Paul Grüninger, the Chief of Police of Saint Gall, Switzerland; Aristedes de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux, France; Sempo Sugihara, the Japanese Consul in Kovno, Lithuania; Oskar Schindler, industrialist and war-time contractor in Poland and Nazi Sudetenland; and, Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish Legation Attaché in Budapest, Hungary. Some acted in geographical regions where Nazi domination had not yet been consolidated or was in decline. Others made sustained efforts over prolonged periods

in areas under total German domination.

Paul Grüninger, Chief of Police of Saint Gall, Switzerland, (August-December, 1938), permitted refugees to cross the border to safety. Before the arrival of the German armies in the south of France in May 1940, Aristedes de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese Consul in Bordeaux, France freely issued visas for Jewish refugees to enter Portugal. From 23 July to the end of August 1940, Sempo Sugihara, served as the Japanese consul in Kovno, Lithuania. During brief transition to Russian rule in the wake of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, Sugihara issued Japanese transit visas enabling Jews to leave Lithuania under the fiction of passage to the Dutch colony of Curaçao (situated off the northern coast of South America) via Japan.¹⁵ During the last year of

the war, from July 1944, Raoul Wallenberg intervened before the Germans had accomplished the total destruction of Hungarian Jewry. He rescued large numbers of Jews by extending Swedish diplomatic protection, physical safety through a system of buildings which he maintained, and even physical rescue for those en route to death camps.



Dr. Aristedes de Sousa Mendes,
1940
Portuguese Consul in
Bordeaux, France
COURTESY INTERNATIONAL
COMMITTEE TO COMMEMORATE
DR. MENDES



Oskar Schindler
COURTESY OF THE SIMON
WIESENTHAL CENTER LOS
ANGELES, CA

These diplomatic officers were young, educated, well-born, and aspiring to promising careers. All were obligated to pay a heavy price for their decisive acts of humanity and heroism. Recalled to Portugal, Sousa Mendes was punished and deprived of his career and family fortune. In 1954, he died destitute. Returning to Japan after the war, Sempo Sugihara was refused a recommendation to private industry from the Foreign Office, its customary way of helping wartime diplomats. For a while, he worked as a door-to-door salesman, managed an American PX, and subsequently worked sixteen years for a Japanese trading company.¹⁶ In 1968, when the Israeli Embassy in Tokyo found him,¹⁷ Sugihara was living in Room 821 of the Hotel Minsk in Moscow. Although the State of Israel and later the Government of Japan honored him, apparently he spent many of his productive years as a nonperson in exile, having lost face. Raoul Wallenberg met his end in Soviet Russian captivity under highly suspicious circumstances.

We do know that, despite the considerable pain and humiliation they endured, the surviving diplomatic officers were proud of their deeds. Sousa Mendes stated: "My desire is to be with God against man, rather than with man against God,"¹⁸ and Sugihara reflected, "Whatever punishment may be imposed on me, I know I should follow my conscience."¹⁹ According to the State Prosecutor, Paul Grüninger allowed some 3,600 people to enter Switzerland illegally²⁰; Aristedes



*Sempo Sugihara
Japanese Consul
in Kaunas (Kovno),
Lithuania 1940*
COURTESY OF THE SIMON
WIESENTHAL CENTER
LOS ANGELES, CA

de Sousa Mendes issued thousands of visas to Portugal; Sempo Sugihara issued between 1,600 to 3,500 transit visas through Japan (saving intact the famous Lithuanian Yeshiva of Mir). In addition to the relief and rescue efforts described above, Raoul Wallenberg may have saved thousands of lives by foiling a German plan to blow up the International Jewish Ghetto in Budapest.

The actions of Sugihara, Mendes, and Grüninger required the discretionary authority of a single person capable of acting heroically and decisively at the crucial moment. In contrast, the efforts of Oskar Schindler²¹ and Raoul Wallenberg were complex, demanding extraordinary organizational abilities, enlisting and maintaining the active cooperation of others over sustained periods of time. The rescue of Danish Jewry is all the more remarkable, because it mobilized large numbers of people over a very short time.

In matters of rescue, churches had a special advantage. Not wanting to offend against conquered populations (particularly in Western Europe) and hoping to win the collaboration of the local clergy, the Nazis showed relative lenience toward Christian religious institutions. As a rule, churches retained some control over their property, having in some cases near immunity and maintaining a hierarchy governed by the principals of faith and obedience. These are some of the objective reasons why Christian churches and religious communities were able, given the will, to act effectively on behalf of the persecuted.

To the extent that political geography was a factor, it was proportionately more difficult to hide Jews in the Baltic countries and Poland, which had deeply rooted traditions of violent antisemitism, whereas conversely, it was easier in Belgium, Denmark, and even Fascist Italy, where the population was more inclined to participate in rescue efforts. To appreciate this state of affairs, one must take into account the presuppositions and assumptions prevailing in the local environment where there may have been established traditions of deference to authority or ingrained patterns of violent antisemitism. In the case of Poland, which had such a tradition, the penalty for helping a Jew was death—partially because the Nazis regarded the Poles as a lesser Slavic race whose good will was not a particularly high priority. The same policy also applied to the Ukraine. In these areas of hostile antisemitism, Jews who tried to escape the Nazis had their grief compounded by informers and blackmailers. Emanuel Ringelblum, historian of the Warsaw ghetto, minutely documented the malicious deeds of these individuals in Poland whose activities resulted in betrayal and destruction of many Jews and their rescuers who might otherwise have survived.²²



*Raoul Wallenberg
Swedish Legation Attache
in Budapest, Hungary*
COURTESY OF YAD VASHEM

The acts of individuals hiding Jews in their homes and the different types of rescue efforts reveal similarities: humanitarian motivation, religious or personal conviction, nobility of spirit, initiative and willingness to act, and a refusal to conform with the behavior of the general population. In perspective and in view of the considerable priority the Nazis gave to the Final Solution, rescue was both an act of compassion and of resistance against Nazi Germany in defiance of one's cultural environment. Saving Jews as a political act was frequently undertaken by different national resistance movements (although not invariably, because some populations, while opposed to Nazi domination, welcomed the Final Solution.) In the struggle for humane values, the Righteous Gentiles who took a stand frequently had to pay a high price if found out or betrayed. In some societies their greatness was not appreciated. There were known cases of rescuers murdered by their compatriots or compelled to flee from their country after the war in fear for their safety. In the context of the obstacles and dangers which the rescuers confronted, their acts are significant, whether their efforts were fully or partially successful and their motives pure or otherwise.

In a spiritual and ideological sense, the deeds of the Righteous Gentiles assume a universal dimension. In the context of the relations between Gentiles and Jews, the examples of the Righteous Gentiles, though statistically small, are of far-reaching qualitative significance. Notwithstanding the failures of Christian churches and the legacy of Christian antisemitism, the sacrifices of the Righteous Gentiles have brought members of the two religions closer together, at a time when Judaism and Christianity have taken thoughtful steps toward spiritual reconciliation.

ENDNOTES

¹ Examples of such new terms are "Holocaust," "resistance," and "collaboration." The experience of the Nazi occupation witnessed levels of depravity never before known in the history of humanity, and the Allies defined the concept of the War Criminal (which they subsequently addressed in the postwar Nuremberg Tribunals, 1945-1948).

² *Encyclopedia Ha-Talmudi*, III:362.

³ Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims, Vol. I: Ideology, and Nazi State and the Course of Expansion* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1973), p. xlii.

⁴ Rich, *Vol II: The Establishment of the New Order* (London: Deutsch, 1974) p. 11, 12.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ See particularly Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann, *The Racial State: Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷ Miep Gies with Alison Leslie Gold, *Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of Miep Gies, Who Helped Hide the Frank Family* (London: Bantam Press, 1987). p. xi.

⁸ Moshe Bejski, "The 'Righteous among the Nations' and Their Part in the Rescue of Jews," in Gutman and Rothkirchen, eds., *The Catastrophe of European Jewry* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976), p. 584. For general reference, see Mordecai Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile*

Rescuers of Jews in the Holocaust (Hoboken: New Jersey: KTAV, 1993).

⁹ Interview with Mordecai Paldiel, Director of the Department for the Righteous Gentiles, Yad Vashem, May 3, 1994.

¹⁰ Bejski, op. cit. p. 585.

¹¹ Interview with Gesina V.D. Molen, Aerdenhout, The Netherlands, Project 107, Cassette 820, Oral History Division, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University.

¹² The number of awards granted is also dependent on the nominating process. Dutch Jews, for example, are usually more diligent in making nominations than French Jews. Interview with Dr. Josef Michman, former director of Yad Vashem and member of the Commission for Righteous Gentiles, Jerusalem, May 9, 1994.

¹³ Moshe Bejski, op. cit. p. 592.

¹⁴ Ibid. (See also *Encyclopedia Ha-Talmudi*, 1281.)

¹⁵ David H. Kranzler, *Japanese, Nazis and Jews: The Jewish Refugee Community in Shanghai, 1938-1945*, (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1976); and Zorach Warhaftig, *Palit ve-Sarid be-Yemei HaShoah* (Refugee and Remnant: Rescue Efforts During the Holocaust) (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1984); and interview with Dr. Z. Warhaftig, Jerusalem, May 10, 1994.

¹⁶ Abraham Rabinovich, "Disobedient Diplomat," *Jerusalem Post*, November 29, 1985.

¹⁷ Yad Vashem File No. 2861.

¹⁸ E.H. IV:1382.

¹⁹ E.H. IV:1423-4.

²⁰ E.H. and Peter Gumbel, "A Swiss Who Bent Rules to Save Jews Is Refused a Pardon," *Wall Street Journal*, June 3, 1994.

²¹ Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's List* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1982); and Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims*, II, p.10, concerning opposition and resistance of Nazi war industries to giving up Jewish laborers:

Under pressure Himmler and Wilhelm Keitel (Field Marshall, and from 1938-1945 Chief of the High Command of the Armed Forces) issued an order on September 5, 1942, that all Jews employed by the Wehrmacht for armament production or military services of any kind were to be replaced immediately by non-Jews. But the men who ran these war industries proved to be far from cooperative, and they received considerable support in resisting orders to give up their Jews from German military and civilian officials.

²² See especially: Emmanuel Ringelblum, *Polish-Jewish Relations During the Second World War*, eds. Joseph Kermish and Shmuel Krakowski, (New York: Howard Fertig, 1976). Of central importance to our understanding of all aspects of rescue in Poland is the thoughtful and important contribution of Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced The Darkness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF YAD VASHEM'S "RIGHTEOUS" PROGRAM

by Mordecai Paldiel, Ph.D.

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The Holocaust raises very disturbing questions about human nature in general and about ourselves as ethical beings. One distressing question is how it was possible for "civilized" men, in a nation long-rooted in Christian thought patterns, to have acted in a manner so blatantly opposed to the biblical tradition which it claimed as its own—by launching a campaign of mass murder unprecedented in its scope? Are we to grudgingly conclude that the biblical viewpoint of man as a moral creature is a faulty proposition? Does the Holocaust lead us to uphold a totally contradictory philosophy of life which sees human affairs as governed by an incessant and pitiless struggle for existence, where only the fittest survive? Of humans as their own worst enemy, self-destructive brutes, bent on the uncontrollable appeasement of their innate insatiable drives, with no concern for others, unless stopped and reined in by society's laws? Does the Holocaust sadly confirm our worst suspicions about ourselves, and is this the lesson we propose to bequeath in educating our children about this terrible event?

Since 1963, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem has sponsored a program honoring non-Jews who risked their lives to save Jews from destruction during the Holocaust. It is important to note that Yad Vashem was created as a national memorial to commemorate the depredations of the Holocaust. At the same time, Yad Vashem left the door open to a glimmer of hope; this, through the Righteous program. One should also emphasize that those honored with this title were individuals who risked their own lives and freedoms to rescue Jews from the Nazis. The Nazis made it clear that they would brook no interference in their drive to destroy the Jewish people and would mete out harsh punishment, even death, to those trying to foil this demonic plan. And yet there were thousands, indeed tens of thousands, from all walks of life and denominations, prepared to take these risks to spare Jewish lives. These rescuers are honored by Yad Vashem as "Righteous Among the Nations," an ancient rabbinic term to designate non-Jews who structure their lives in accordance with certain moral principles.

The example of the Righteous Among the Nations suggests that there is yet another dimension to human behavior than the blatant inhumanity exposed during the Holocaust and that the horror of this watershed event only represents one side of the picture, a very awesome but only a partial one. For in every country of Europe where Jews found themselves threatened with death or deportation to the camps, there were to be found non-Jews, in not insignificant numbers, who, for reasons as yet not fully explainable, were prepared to risk their lives to save Jews from annihilation because, as they have repeatedly stated, they felt it was their duty and obligation, as responsible human beings or believing Christians, to extend a helping hand and save one or several lives, even if it put their own lives in great jeopardy.

These persons are erroneously perceived as gifted with a high moral standard in all areas of their life activities. In actuality, they combine in their personality the same strengths and failings found in most socially integrated persons; they neither demonstrate unique forms nor articulate ethical standards of behavior different from others in their midst. The only way they distinguish themselves from others is in the rescue story itself. Here, too, they were not in any particular way altruistically inclined and did not seek out Jews in distress in order to help them. The altruistic challenge was sprung upon them in the form of fleeing Jews asking to be sheltered or helped in another way in order to survive. And for those meeting the qualifying test they responded in the affirmative, perhaps to their own surprise.

This initial on-the-spot affirmative response released in these persons certain unknown and untested attributes which gushed forth with such strength as to enable them to master their fears and carry on with the work of rescue for an indefinite period of time. Their example offers an alternative role model for human behavior of a more benign type, in times of great stress. These characteristics include:

- A moral awareness that one has no choice but to intervene to prevent the destruction of innocent lives taking place before their very eyes.
- The capacity to act upon one's conviction and decide on the spot to get involved and save lives in spite of the risks to themselves and their loved ones.
- A readiness to assume personal responsibility for the care and sustenance of those under one's protection, even for an indefinite period of time.

When the Knesset (Israel's parliament) in 1953 included a provision in the new Yad Vashem law, stating that the soon-to-be national Holocaust memorial was required also to deal with "the Righteous Among the Nations who risked their lives to save Jews," the intention may have been no more than to express the Jewish people's gratitude to non-Jews who saved Jews from the Nazis. However, the Righteous program, which has since added more than 13,000 names to its honor

roster, has assumed a much greater significance, especially when contrasted with the sordid world of the Holocaust, as evidenced by numerous documents and eyewitness accounts. In my estimation, the significance of the Righteous programs stems from the following:

1. The eyewitness testimonies of thousands of rescued persons clearly show that the rescuers were a much larger phenomenon than initially envisioned in the post-Holocaust period. But because of the forces arrayed against them, they could only save a fraction, relative to the murdered millions. They were not saints, but ordinary people doing their bit, while everyone else (other than the perpetrators) either knuckled under for fear of retribution or put blinders over their eyes.
2. The Righteous phenomenon is ample proof that it was indeed possible to help and that the paralyzing effect of fear need not bring us to a complete standstill. Human beings are (or at least can be) morally upright and may exert themselves to acts of gratuitous benevolence, even at great risks to themselves. This is no mere philosophical statement but is borne out by thousands of rescues recorded at Yad Vashem.
3. The Holocaust, it has been said, demonstrates how well-educated and law-abiding citizens can be transformed, in the words of Franklin Littell, into "technically competent barbarians." At the same time, the riddle of human behavior is more complex than the crimes committed during the Holocaust would lead us to believe. The examples of the Righteous demonstrate that the human spirit, through repeatedly battered and damaged, is still a potent force to be reckoned with. This humanitarian spark, though dormant in most people, may suddenly be kindled in the hearts of some, especially in those who can momentarily distance themselves from the suffocating pressures of social conventions (for the Holocaust is the story of an organized and group-orchestrated crime) and act instead as individuals with a deep concern for others in distress.
4. The example of the Righteous can therefore serve as a potent palliative against the depressing effects which a confrontation with the hellish world of the Holocaust produces in us. It represents a barrier against the psychologically battering effect of the Nazi legacy. The Righteous provide us with true heroes, knights of the spirit, versus the villains of which we hear so much. They demonstrate the presence of an intrinsic benign human quality that can offset and stem the aggressiveness within us and that can enable us to see a way out even when cowed and intimidated by an oppressive totalitarian regime. By identifying with the Righteous, we lay claim to the goodness in us, which is as inherently human as other less pleasant manifestations in our behavior.

The fact that in every Nazi-occupied country persons such as the Righteous were to be found in significant numbers is a source of comfort and a reaffirmation of our resolve to establish a more humane society, which is the goal of all of the world's major religions. The example from the Righteous strengthens our belief that this is not an empty quest but one filled with renewed strength, promise, and hope.

In my twelve years as head of the Department for the Righteous at Yad Vashem, I have become aware of the intensity of feelings among survivors in their determination to honor their erstwhile rescuers. This goes beyond the traditional commandment of "hakarot tovah", of expressing appreciation and gratitude to those who have helped you. In the area of gentile rescuers of Jews, the requirement of "hakarot tovah" is blended with a zeal and passion of a special kind, a zeal which only makes sense when placed against the background of the hellish world of the Holocaust experienced by survivors. At some point in the lives of the rescued, the realization dawns upon them that they cannot part from this world without giving an account for posterity of their miraculous survival. This is accompanied with the equal passionate determination to have their rescuers publicly honored through Yad Vashem, an arm of the Israeli government, as a public gesture of the Jewish people's appreciation of the rescuer's humanitarian deed.

I am constantly amazed how people, otherwise coolly rational in their day-to-day decisions, assume a prophetic mantle when pleading for recognition of their gentile rescuers. An even more emotional experience for survivors takes place during ceremonies at Yad Vashem in honor of the Righteous. As both parties to the rescue episode meet on this consecrated ground, strong pent-up emotions are released which I am at a loss for words to accurately depict; these are feelings which I sense pertain to a lifetime of memories suddenly condensed into a single moment, especially of memories reflecting the harsh reality of the Holocaust days: of loved ones lost in a certain "action" or in the furnaces of the camps, of physical and emotional scars sustained, and held in check over the years, and suddenly . . . a coming to terms with that terrible past. I admit that at times, while presiding over ceremonies in honor of the Righteous, I cannot help but be carried away, myself, by these emotional outbursts, each one unique in a special way. These moments translate into psychological reinforcement for someone involved in this type of work, inspiring one with a greater determination to get on with the job of recording rescue stories for posterity's sake.

THE PROCESS OF COMMEMORATING DEEDS OF HEROISM

by Alex Grobman, Ph.D.

Director, Martyrs Memorial and Museum of the Holocaust

Designating the Righteous

In 1953, the Knesset passed the Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Law creating Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Israel's national memorial to the six million Jews. As part of its mandate, Yad Vashem established a Commission for the Designation of the Righteous to honor "the high-minded Gentiles who risked their lives to save Jews." The commission is chaired by a member of the Supreme Court of Israel.¹

To be granted the title "Righteous Among the Nations," the rescuer must have:

- a. On his own initiative been actively and directly involved in saving a Jew from being killed or sent to a concentration camp when the Jews were trapped in a country under the control of the Germans or their collaborators during the most dangerous periods of the Holocaust and totally dependent on the goodwill of non-Jews.
- b. Risked everything including his own life, freedom, and safety.
- c. Not received any form of remuneration or reward as a precondition for providing help.
- d. Offered proof from the survivor or incontrovertible archival evidence that the deeds had "caused" a rescue that would not otherwise have occurred and thus went beyond what might be regarded as ordinary assistance.²

Risk is the basic criterion for granting this award—not altruism. Those who aided Jews in countries that were not under Nazi rule or who had diplomatic immunity where there was little or no risk are not eligible for consideration. Jews also cannot be proposed for this honor. The three basic criteria are thus: risk, survival, and evi-

dence

A candidate is nominated by those who were saved. Notarized applications are sent directly to Yad Vashem through an Israeli embassy or consulate. Data requested by Yad Vashem about the rescuer include the individual's name, approximate age at the time, present address, occupation, and marital status during the war.³

In addition to these questions, the witness-survivor is asked:

- a. To describe briefly his or her life before the start of the rescue story.
- b. How and when the rescuer was met.
- c. Who initiated the rescue.
- d. Dates and places of rescue.
- e. The nature of aid given and if this involved hiding, what were the conditions.
- f. If there were any financial arrangements.
- g. The rescuer's motivations.
- h. The risks involved.
- i. How the cover-up story (presence of the witness) was explained to others.
- j. The relations between the witness and rescuer at the time.
- k. The name and age of others in the rescuer household who helped and the nature of assistance provided by each individual.
- l. The nature of the departure from the rescuer.
- m. The names and addresses of others who helped the rescuer.
- n. The type of incidents that occurred during the stay at the rescuer's home.

Finally, the witness is asked to nominate the individual or individuals in the rescuer's home for the title of "Righteous Among the Nations."⁴

The commission is composed of thirty members. Practically all are survivors who come from various social strata of Israeli society. Some, for example, work in the public sector; others are professionals.⁵ The commission meets between twenty to twenty-five times a year, sometimes as many as thirty. They are divided into three subcommittees with ten in each. At every session they consider at least twelve cases. Each case is meticulously examined: witnesses are interviewed, testimony is heard, and documents are reviewed. Certain cases are fairly straightforward, others are complex. In a situation where there is a dispute, a plenum is convened to resolve the issue. The commission works on precedent and guidelines established over the years. In this way, they avoid codifying the criteria. Common sense plays a major role in all their decisions.

In determining who should be granted this distinction, the commission has had to grapple with many complicated issues. What, for example, do you do in the following cases?

Q: When the rescuer was part of the Nazi machine of destruction?

A: Hans Calmeyer of Holland had the responsibility for separating Jews from non-Jews in cases where the lineage of an individual was unclear. To subvert the system and save Jews, he fabricated their backgrounds whenever he could. "Are you sure your father is really your father," he would ask. "Maybe your mother had an affair."

Whenever doubts about a person's origins were successfully raised, deportations were postponed until further classifications could be made. The Germans were concerned about destroying precious Aryan blood, especially that of the Dutch, who were considered pure-blooded Aryans. Once Calmeyer succeeded in postponing the deportations, he would secure fake documents and affidavits from Jakarta and other cities where records would be difficult to verify. Half of the people on Calmeyer's List were fabricated in this way. By playing for time, Calmeyer succeeded in saving 2,800 Jews. Although part of the Nazi destruction machine, he received an award from Yad Vashem because he subverted the system and saved Jewish lives.⁶



*Garden of the Righteous Gentiles
Yad Vashem, Jerusalem*

COURTESY ISAAC HARARI YAD VASHEM

Kurt Gerstein was also a part of the Nazi destruction process, but his case is much more complicated. Gerstein, whose story is recounted in Rolf Hochhuth's play *The Deputy*, was a member of the SS from 1941 until his death in July 1945. He briefly studied theology and medicine before becoming a mining engineer. In January 1942, Gerstein was appointed head of the Technical Disinfection Services of the Waffen SS where he was responsible for improving the efficiency of the gas chambers by procuring the highly toxic prussic acid (Zyklon B).

He claimed to have joined the SS "to carry on an active fight and learn more about the aims of the Nazis and their secrets," after being told in 1940 by the Bishop of Stuttgart that

mentally ill patients were being killed at Hadamar and Grafeneck. Among those who were murdered was his sister-in-law Bertha Ebling.⁷

Hitler initiated the adult euthanasia policy in the summer of 1939. Six killing centers were established beginning in 1940, although only four were operational at any one time. Adult handicapped patients were murdered in gas chambers. In August, 1941, Hitler stopped the first phase of the killings, because of the hostility of the German public to the killings.⁸

In August 1942, Gerstein inspected the extermination camps at Belzec, Sobibor, and Treblinka. At Belzec near Lublin, he witnessed the gassing of a transport of Jews from Lemberg (Lvov). On his way back to Berlin, Gerstein unexpectedly met Baron von Otter, Secretary to the Swedish Legation, on the Warsaw-Berlin Express. Gerstein confided in the Baron about the gassing and the entire destruction process, because he believed that if the extermination of the Jews was publicly acknowledged by neutral countries, the German people would demand that the killings be terminated immediately. For this reason, he also informed Superintendent General Otto Dibelius of the Confessing Church, members of the Dutch resistance, the coadjutor of the Catholic Bishop of Berlin, the press attaché at the Swiss Legation in Berlin, and anyone else who he felt would spread the word about these atrocities.⁹

His efforts to alert the West did not halt the demise of European Jewry. The Allies already knew this information from other sources, but they were not prepared to do anything concrete to stop the killing.¹⁰

On April 22, 1945, Gerstein surrendered to the French, who shortly thereafter arrested him as an alleged war criminal. They then took him to the Cherche-Midi Prison on July 5, 1945. Twenty days later, Gerstein was found dead in his cell.¹¹ Whether he committed suicide out of despair and guilt in not being able to stop the destruction or whether he was murdered by other SS officers in the prison remains a mystery.

Some of the questions Yad Vashem are attempting to answer: Why did Gerstein join the SS? Did he really think that he could effect a change in the Nazi Party? Didn't his earlier failure to stop the Nazis from gaining control of the Protestant youth movements, his arrest and imprisonment in 1936 for possessing and distributing illegal pamphlets of the Confessional Church which led to his expulsion from the Nazi Party, his second arrest and incarceration in 1938 for allegedly supporting an organization that would aid in the restoration of the monarchy should there be a political coup¹² convince him of the futility of such actions? Why did he stay in his position to the very end of the war? Surely he did not have the rank, authority, influence, or the latitude to act in areas beyond his own responsibilities to effect significant change. Since he knew his limitations, why did he remain part of the destruction process?

In the end, despite all the risks he took, Gerstein did not save Jews. Moreover, if he committed suicide, he deprived the Allies of an important eyewitness they could have used at the Nuremberg Trials and other war crime tribunals. Given Yad Vashem's strong misgivings about honoring Germans who were part of the destruction process, the outcome of this case is being watched with interest.¹³

Q: When a non-Jew saves a Jew who has voluntarily converted? When the person who saves a Jew is a Gentile but was born a Jew? Is this still a case of a Jew helping a Jew?

A: A Jewish woman who converted to Christianity in 1939, married a non-Jewish Pole in 1943. Since her husband saved her during the war, the woman nominated him for a Yad Vashem award. The request was denied. The commission has ruled that if a non-Jew saves a converted Jew, who has freely severed his or her link to the Jewish people, the individual is ineligible. This also applies to a converted Jew who saves a Jew. If the Jew converted during the war to save himself, however, he can be considered for the award.

The rationale is that although a Jew who converts to another religion is a Jew according to Halacha (Jewish law), the individual no longer wants to be part of the Jewish people. He or she should not then be considered a Jew for the purposes of this award. In this case, when the Pole married this converted Jewish woman, he was marrying a Catholic woman, not a Jewish one. The marriage ceremony even took place in the church.¹⁴

Q: When an antisemite rescues a Jew?

A: Before the war, Zofia Kossak-Szatkowska, a pious Polish Catholic from a prominent family, had distinguished herself as a writer of historical novels. As a nationalist with well-known right-wing sympathies and membership in the Catholic organization Front for a Reborn Poland (F.O.P.), she did not appear to be someone likely to champion the cause of oppressed Jews.

Nevertheless, she actively worked with the underground as a representative of the F.O.P. During the summer of 1942, Zofia wrote "The Protest," an illegal leaflet condemning the "annihilation" of the Jews and the silence of America, England, and the Poles. "This silence," she asserted, "can no longer be tolerated. Whatever the reason for it, it is vile . . . Whoever is silent . . . becomes a partner to the murder. Whoever does not condemn, consents."

Although she demanded that Catholics and Poles raise their voices in protest against these atrocities, she assured them that they need not give up their negative attitude toward Jews. "We continue to deem them political, economic, and ideological enemies of Poland," (but this does) "not release us from the duty of damnation of murder." Zofia's call for the estab-

lishment of an underground organization to save Jews, which she made after the publication of the leaflet, was realized on December 4, 1942, when the Council for Aid to Jews (known by its code name "Zegota") came into existence.

Zofia did not become a member of the Council but she did continue her work with the Jews as well as her other activities in the underground. This led to her capture in 1943 and incarceration in Auschwitz for almost a year. After being discharged, she began saving Jewish children by placing them in convents and other religious institutions.

Zofia received an award from Yad Vashem because of her efforts, despite her antisemitic views. Although Zofia and the small number of other antisemitic rescuers viewed the presence of Jews in Poland as a social and economic threat to their well-being, they did not envision systematic mass murder as the solution. Some were concerned that their antisemitic views might have "indirectly or symbolically" played a role in the extermination of the Jews.

The war stripped the Jews of these negative attributes, revealing a people who, despite their strange and different ways, were part of a common struggle with the Poles against the Nazis. The Jews were now seen as human beings, as the underdogs, who were badly in need of help. To atone for their antisemitic attitudes, these rescuers tried to save Jews.¹⁵

Q When priests and other clergy baptized Jewish children to raise them as Christians?

A When Jewish parents entrusted their children to the church for safe-keeping before being deported to the concentration and extermination camps, they expected to get them back at the end of the war. Many baptized children were returned, but large numbers were not. The exact number that were not given back to the Jewish people will never be known. Girls were the most difficult to find.

Children were baptized because conversion significantly lessened the danger of their being discovered¹⁶ by the Nazis and their collaborators. Once a child became immersed in Catholicism, the possibility that the individual's true origins would be revealed were greatly diminished. Catholicism also offered a sense of security and comfort to the children. After the war, many children had difficulty giving up Catholicism and returning to Judaism.¹⁷

Nuns and priests who sheltered Jewish children were given awards from Yad Vashem even if they converted their charges and were reluctant to return them after the war. For the most part, they had acted on their own, since the Vatican and the Polish clergy had not articulated a clear-cut policy about the systematic mass murder of the Jewish people.

Q When money was paid. Was it acceptable to share in household expenses?

A: As long as sharing in the household expenses was not a precondition for sheltering Jews, it was permissible to do so. This was especially true if the Pole had little or no money, and the Jew had the means to help. Securing food took a lot of ingenuity and daring during wartime when food was quite scarce.¹⁸

Q: When a rescuer shelters a Jew for a year and then expels him?

A: The circumstances of how the Jew left the protection of his rescuer is the main issue in this case. If the rescuer asked the Jew to leave without any means of finding another haven, then he is ineligible. If the rescuer could not shelter him anymore but secured another place of refuge for the Jew, then the non-Jew is eligible.¹⁹

Q: When collaborators—Ukrainians, French, Italians—saved Jews for political reasons?

A: There are several types of individuals who fit this category, including

- a. Those who were pro-German because they believed that Nazi ideology would further the national aspirations of their country
- b. Those who participated in a paramilitary unit
- c. Those who advocated Nazi victory and called upon their fellow countrymen for their help to ensure this triumph

If these people saved Jews they could, in rare instances, be eligible for consideration.

Q: What about public figures who saved Jews but called for close cooperation with the Nazis?

A: The problem of awarding the Righteous title to a person in this category can be seen in the case of Metropolitan Andreas Sheptitsky of Lvov, who had hidden about 150 Jews in monasteries in eastern Galicia. He did not receive an award from Yad Vashem despite his having rescued Jews. The reason? According to Mordechai Paldiel, "His advocacy of a German victory, his call for Ukrainians to join Nazi units, and his silence at the wholesale pogroms of Jews by his own countrymen, taking place right under his own window, disqualified him in the eyes of Yad Vashem to bear the Righteous title. For a man in his position (head of an important church in Ukraine), to remain silent at the killings of Jews, in which his own people participated, and at the same time, to call for a Nazi victory, morally canceled out his involvement in saving a handful of Jews."

There were also individuals who belonged to the fascist movements, such as the "Milice Française" in France and the Iron Cross in Hungary, who saved Jews. People who joined these groups would have "great difficulty" in being awarded the Righteous title, "since such units participated in wholesale criminal activities, and it would have to be proved that candidates for the Righteous title did not smear their hands with innocent blood."

Those who donned the uniform of the SS in Latvia and Ukraine to pacify the countryside but saved a Jew or even several Jews cannot be considered. Saving some Jews while participating in the mass destruction of hundreds or thousands of others does not absolve them of their crimes.

Guards at a concentration or extermination camp are in the same category, even if they helped save a few Jewish lives. They did not have to serve at the camp since they could have been excused from their positions without retribution.²⁰

Q When individuals were part of the German civil service administration?

A When Hitler and Stalin partitioned Poland in 1939, Zloczow, a town in Galicia, became part of the Soviet Union. On July 1, 1941, more than 3,000 of Zloczow's 16,000 Jews were murdered by the Nazis after they had invaded Russia. The rest were herded into a ghetto.

In December 1941, Josef Meyer, a German civil servant, approached Solomon Altmann, a lawyer who now managed a bakery, to offer his help to the Jewish community. As director of the district department of agriculture and food procurement, Meyer was able to double the number of people listed as employed by his department so that he could increase the food allocation to the ghetto. He also established a free kitchen there. To justify the large quantities of food being consumed, Meyer kept books showing that the food had been sent to army units and business firms, all of which were fictitious.

To increase the number of Jews legitimately working and thus spare them from being sent to the gas chambers, Meyer established a candy factory. When he heard that 1,000 Jewish inmates at a nearby labor camp were to be killed unless the typhus epidemic in the camp decreased significantly, he smuggled in soap and medicine which saved them.

In January 1943, the Gestapo arrested Meyer but released him for lack of evidence after three days of intensive interrogation. Just before the Germans liquidated the Zloczow ghetto in April 1943, Meyer arranged with the Strassler brothers, who operated the candy factory, to dig a tunnel large enough to hide thirty people. For almost a year, the Strassler group lived in the tunnel, which was 20 feet below the market square. The Germans suspected that Jews were hiding in the area, but the Jews were so far below ground that they could not be

detected by the German dogs. Cooking smoke was vented through one of the sewers.

Meyer provided the food and whatever else they required to sustain themselves. At the same time, Meyer arranged for a Pole to hide Altmann, his son, and Altmann's father in a bunker behind a barn. Mrs. Altmann went to Warsaw, where friends took care of her after Meyer secured Aryan identity papers for her and then drove her to Lvóv and put her on the train. Meyer also found refuge for Altman's handyman Josef and Josef's wife.

When the Red Army liberated the town in July 1944, all the Jews that Meyer had protected were still alive, although by then he had been evacuated westward by the German army. In 1965, Meyer visited Israel where he was honored by Yad Vashem. Although he had been part of the German civil service, he circumvented the rules and, at enormous risk to himself, had saved Jewish lives. In his testimony to Yad Vashem, Solomon Altmann noted: "The fact that he saved our lives is certainly important. But the fact that Herr Meyer kept alive our belief in man is even more important."²¹

Q: When a rescuer was a member of the German military?

A: The highest ranking German officer to receive recognition by Yad Vashem is Major Max Liedtke. On July 26, 1942, Liedtke, a 46-year-old commander of the local garrison in Przemyśl, Poland, ordered his troops to shoot any member of the SS who tried to deport the 80 Jews that he was protecting at his headquarters. A violent confrontation at a bridge over the San River was averted when the SS decided not to force the issue.

Liedtke was transferred to the Russian front for his action but without being stripped of his rank. He was captured and later died in a camp in the Urals.²²

Q: When a person saved a Jew at the end of the war, for example, April 25, 1945?

A: If the rescue took place in an area still under Nazi control and involved real risk, the rescuer would most probably receive an award. If the rescuer had a questionable wartime record, however, and saved a Jew to avoid answering for his actions or he feared prosecution, he may be ineligible for consideration.²³

Q: When a couple who save a Jewish child refuse to give up the child and the only the way to get the child back is by kidnapping?

A: Some of those who saved Jewish children became so emotionally attached to their charges that they would not willingly give them back to the parents or if the parents had died, to representatives of the Jewish community. Kidnapping became the only available

option to retrieve the children and ensure that they be raised as Jews.

Even under these circumstances, Yad Vashem recognized them for having risked their lives to save Jews. Some of these couples might have taken the children because they were childless. Motivation is not a concern, because these people did not ask to be compensated. That they had difficulty in returning the children demonstrated the strong attachments that had developed between child and adoptive parents.²⁴

The decision by Yad Vashem to honor only rescuers who saved Jews has meant that some people who deserve special recognition are ineligible to receive this award. An example will illustrate the problem.

A girl was born to a Jewish father and a Christian mother in the early 1930s and raised in the Christian faith. According to Jewish law, the child was Christian because the religion of a child is determined by the religion of the mother. Although Jewish law regarded her as a Christian, the Nazis considered her a Jew because one of her parents was Jewish.

The father fled Munich in 1939 with the hope of finding a haven for his family. The family ultimately found refuge in a village where they were protected for two years by the mayor. After the war, the family sent an application to Yad Vashem on behalf of the mayor. The application was turned down because the girl he had saved was technically not Jewish.²⁵

Perhaps one solution might be to have a separate award for those who saved a non-Jew.

The Ceremony

Rescuers are honored at a public ceremony at Yad Vashem. Until Yad Vashem ran out of space, a carob tree was planted by the rescuer along the Avenue of the Righteous, which leads to the museum. The individual's name and nationality were inscribed on a plaque at its base. Some have wrongly ascribed religious significance to this choice because the bean pods of the tree sustained John the Baptist during his wanderings in the wilderness (Mark 1:6).²⁶ Yad Vashem chose the carob tree because the tree is a perennial, is sturdy and strong, but not dominating like the cypress tree, which is associated with pride.²⁷

Now the rescuer's name is placed on the Wall of Honor. The ceremony begins at Ohel Yizkor (the Hall of Remembrance) where a cantor recites the *Kel Maleh Rachamim* (God who is merciful) and the Mourner's Kaddish (prayer that glorifies God's name), and then the rescuer rekindles the eternal flame. The main prayer is said in the rescuer's native language. A wreath is then placed on the vault containing ashes of the Holocaust victims.

The ceremony continues at the Wall of Honor where the rescuer's name is unveiled. If the

rescuer has not yet received a medal that bears his name and a certificate of honor from an Israeli embassy abroad, the presentation is made at this point. They are inscribed with the Talmudic adage that states, "He who saves one life is considered as having saved the whole universe." The rescuer is then invited to say a few words, those who were saved then speak.

As the survivors enter their twilight years, the number of applications have increased dramatically. The first nomination from the former Soviet Union arrived in 1989. A full-time person fluent in Russian has been added to the staff to deal with the very significant requests from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The program will come to an end within the next decade.

Not everyone awarded the title "Righteous Among the Nations" is willing to accept this honor. A number refuse to acknowledge that they are heroes. Some disapprove of Israeli government policies. Those in Eastern Europe who admit to having saved Jews run the risk of being ostracized or worse. In the immediate post-war period, in Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania some rescuers have been murdered.²⁸

What type of individual would risk his or her life to save a Jew? Nechama Tec, a professor of sociology who survived the Holocaust by passing as a Christian with the help of Christian Poles, has isolated several characteristics which shed light on this question.

Characteristics of rescuers included:

- a. A high level of individuality, independence, and self-reliance that caused them "to pursue personal goals regardless of how these goals" were perceived by others.
- b. A commitment and involvement in helping the needy that had preceded the war.
- c. A belief that their rescue activities were not heroic or extraordinary but part of their duty.
- d. An "unplanned and gradual beginning of rescue at times involving a sudden, even impulsive move."
- e. A "universalistic perception of the needy" that "overshadowed all other attributes except their dependence on aid."²⁹

Pierre Sauvage, the noted film maker, asserts that religious belief was another significant characteristic of rescuers that has not been adequately addressed. His award-winning documentary, *Weapons of the Spirit*, relates the story of the Protestant village of Le Chambon in southern France that hid 5,000 Jews, including he and his family, during the Nazi occupation. As a pioneer in the field of

the Righteous, he has interviewed many rescuers. He is convinced that religion has played a far greater role in motivating them than is generally recognized. If true, as I believe it is, this issue needs to be studied further.

Celestine Loen, a Hungarian housewife who saved 32 Jews in the basement of her Budapest apartment house, is a rescuer who fits this profile. A native of Yugoslavia, she and her family fled to Budapest after the Nazis annexed part of their native land in 1942. The war had radically changed her upper-class lifestyle. She no longer enjoyed the services of a chauffeur and two housekeepers nor took luxurious vacations. Rather than dwell on her own losses, she became actively involved in saving Jewish lives.

When she heard stories about the extermination camps and saw the Jewish ghetto in Budapest being established during the latter part of 1944, she regularly began visiting the ghetto to bring her friends news about the outside world and to smuggle them food and radios. On one visit, a guard questioned her reason for entering the ghetto. "Those damn Jews owe me money, and I'm here to collect!" she declared. The guard let her pass.

Jews who were able to escape the ghetto found refuge in the basement of Loen's apartment building. From the middle of 1944 through early 1945, she sheltered 32 Jews. Through contacts developed with farmers, she secured enough food—including fresh vegetables, flour, and sometimes fat geese—to feed her family and her charges. A local baker was bribed to bake large quantities of bread.

Sympathetic neighbors and the janitor never complained about the danger involved in hiding Jews in the building. Inexplicably, not all neighbors were aware that their apartment building had become a haven, perhaps because there were never more than eleven Jews in hiding at one time.

During air raids, when the building residents would flee to the basement, the Jews sought refuge in cars parked across the street from the building. When one neighbor became suspicious of one of the Jews, Loen had the suspect dressed up and introduced as a Presbyterian minister.

She also had to hide her activities from some members of her own family who were Nazi sympathizers. But others were more helpful. The family had lost a number of aunts, uncles, and cousins during the war, including Loen's son, who was killed while fighting with the Resistance in Yugoslavia.



Mrs. Celestine Loen

Soviet troops liberated Budapest in January 1945 and shortly thereafter the Jews left the Loens. Some remained in contact with her after the war. In 1947, she emigrated to the United States. Although she never discussed her wartime rescue activities, a number of Jews informed Yad Vashem of her exploits. In May 1966, members of the Jewish Hungarian Club brought her to Israel to thank her personally for saving their lives. She also received a medal and certificate of honor from Yad Vashem. In 1985, a tree bearing her name was planted along the Avenue of the Righteous. She died at the age of 94 in Hacienda Heights, California, not knowing why the Jewish community had gone to such lengths to thank her for something she felt was simply her responsibility as a human being.³⁰

For all our valiant efforts to find the rescuers, their names are "largely unrecorded and their good deeds remain anonymous and unrewarded, except in the emotions of those they saved" observed Sybil Milton, a Holocaust historian.³¹ Some Jews and their rescuers were killed during the war; others died later, leaving no one to tell their stories. Still others, rescued and rescuers, were unable to locate each other after so many years of separation.

Although we will never know the precise number of rescuers who saved Jews, we can learn much from the testimonies of those we have documented. As Sholem Asch, the noted Jewish writer, acknowledged: "It is of the highest importance not only to record and recount, both for ourselves and for the future, the evidences of human degradation, but side by side with them to set forth the evidences of human elevation and nobility. Let the epic of heroic deeds of love, as opposed by those of hatred, of rescue as opposed to destruction, bear equal witness to unborn generations."³²

ENDNOTES

¹ Moshe Bejski, "The Righteous Among the Nations and Their Part in the Rescue of Jews," in *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust*, Yisrael Cutman and Efraim Zuroff, eds. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1977) p. 628.

² Mordecai Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous, Gentile Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (Hoboken: New Jersey, KTAV Publishing House, 1993), p. 5.

³ Interview with Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, September 18, 1994.

⁴ Yad Vashem Questionnaire for Righteous Among The Nations. Yad Vashem, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem.

⁵ Paldiel, op. cit., p. 5.

⁶ Interview with Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, September 18, 1994.

⁷ Saul Friedlander, *Kurt Gerstein: The Ambiguity of Good* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), p. 74.

⁸ Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia To The Final Solution* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995) pp. 86-110.

⁹ Saul Friedlander, op.cit. pp. 126, 128-129.

- ¹⁰ Walter Laqueur, *The Terrible Secret: Suppression of the Truth about Hitler's Final Solution* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980).
- ¹¹ Saul Friedlander, *op cit.* p. 220.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 54-55.
- ¹³ Interview with Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, September 18, 1994.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁵ Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced The Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 104-112, and Joseph Kermish, "The Activities of the Council for Aid to Jews (Zegota) in Occupied Poland," in *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust*, *op cit.*, pp. 367-398.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 147. See also Saul Friedlander, *When Memory Comes*, translated from the French by Helen Lane (New York: Avon Books, 1980).
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 143.
- ¹⁸ Interview with Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, September 18, 1994.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ²¹ *Ibid.* See also Paldiel, *op cit.*, pp. 163-165.
- ²² *Martyrdom and Resistance*, January-February, 1994, p. 9. See also, Eric Silver, *The Book of the Just* (New York: Grove Press, 1992), pp. 137-147.
- ²³ Interview with Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, September 18, 1994.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Peter Hellman, *Avenue of the Righteous: Portraits in Uncommon Courage of Christians and the Jews They Saved from Hitler* (New York: Atheneum, 1980), p. ix.
- ²⁷ Interview with Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, September 18, 1994.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Nechama Tec, *op. cit.*, p. 180.
- ³⁰ *Los Angeles Times* and an interview with Masha Loen, her daughter-in-law, September 20, 1994.
- ³¹ Sybil Milton, "The Righteous Who Helped Jews" in *Genocide: Critical Issues of the Holocaust*, Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes, eds. p. 282.
- ³² Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers' Keepers* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957), pp. 13-14.

THE IMPACT OF THE HOLOCAUST UPON A CHRISTIAN

Harry James Cargas, Ph.D.,
Joel Fishman, Ph.D.

Dr. Harry James Cargas, Professor of Literature and Language at Webster University in St. Louis, is the only Roman Catholic appointed to the International Advisory Committee of Yad Vashem. He is author of over twenty books, including *A Christian Response to the Holocaust*, *On Meeting Kurt Waldheim*, *An Open Letter to Pope John Paul II*, and *Voices from the Holocaust*. A professing Christian, Dr. Cargas directly addresses the history of the Holocaust, the legacy of Christian antisemitism, its meaning for Christianity today, and Jewish-Christian relations. A man with courage to face the past and look the present straight in the eye, Cargas considers himself a "post-Auschwitz Christian." In the following interview by Dr. Joel Fishman, Professor Cargas shares his observations on the subject of heroism and Gentile rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust.

Q: What is the basic importance of the act of rescue?

A: The act has to do not only with the particulars involved but with other matters of cosmic significance. I don't think that any act is merely an individual act; every act has to do with the interconnectedness of everything. No good act is lost. The world is being saved, scripture tells us, because there are ten just persons. That to me means, in part, that the good work of ten people may outweigh the evil of thousands of unjust people. Consequently on the scale of virtue or justice, the good acts count for much more than the neutral actions, or the nonacts.

By this I don't mean to say that the world is redeemed because there were a few Raoul Wallenbergs—and of course the dreadful fact is the rescuers were all too few. But I do think it is important that those kinds of people exist, and it is vital for us to know that. We hear so many depressing stories of people who betrayed others, as I fear I would have. I don't have

any certainly that I would have been virtuous instead of finding excuses—"I have a family," "I must protect my children," "I have a business to run," "I must follow my government's lead," and so forth—so we need to know, for our own psychological health, that some Christians acted as Christians! I would hope that for us the term "heroic Christianity" would be seen as redundant.

All Christians are called to be fully Christian. Persecution has no place in the scheme of our faith. One fact I point out in several of my writings is that every single killer during the Shoah was a baptized Christian. That has implications for Christianity that are enormous. What does that mean to me?

Did Christianity die in the concentration camps? Can it be resurrected? These questions have led me to a personal re-identification. I no longer call myself a Roman Catholic but rather a post-Auschwitz Catholic: one more moved by what happened at Auschwitz than by what did not happen at Rome (the silence of the Vatican) during the same period.

Q: How has the act changed the lives of the rescuer and the rescued?

A: As to the lives of the rescued, these people would have been utterly disillusioned and would have given up on humanity. But then they suddenly found out that there were people who behaved as human beings should in a time of crisis—people who took in strangers at the risk of their own lives and the lives of the rest of the family, that risk being tremendous. Some rescuers who lived in the city sent their own baby children away to farms, to the grandparents, because they knew the children could not keep the secret that they were hiding a Jew. That's a great sacrifice, and I think it has an important impact on the rescued, when they see what some people are willing to do for them.

And the rescuer is changed forever, I think. The rescuers, without being immodest can face the rest of life knowing that when the chips were down, they behaved as they should have behaved. Why are rescuers so modest about their deeds? we might ask. I've concluded that such is the attitude of most true heroes, whether we are talking about rescuers in a fire, an automobile accident, or a swimming emergency, or in the less physical heroics of the protester, the true pacifist, the moral dissenter—they don't go around sticking out their chests saying, "Look at me; I'm a hero."

Q: Do the rescuers you have interviewed have some traits in common?

A: I don't think so. Eva Fleischner (a Christian theologian) did a study of French rescuers some time ago. Her findings were of great interest and value. Her question to all whom she interviewed was "Why did you do it?" Some said, "Because it was my Christian duty." Some

said, "I don't know." Others said, "I was an antisemite until someone in need knocked on my door." So I don't think there are any traits in common.

Q: In other words they didn't know until they were confronted, until they were challenged.

A: In almost every case I think that is true. When I think of the topic of the predictability of how we would act, I think of what I learned in the Korean War. Some men showed courage nine times in a row, and the tenth time they went to pieces, were completely undependable. And then there were men who were undependable nine consecutive times and the tenth time they stood their ground. How could you know ahead of time which way they would act in a given circumstance when they didn't know themselves?

Q: What if a government is unjust? How should we react?

A: Martin Luther King showed us one way. Shmuel Zygielbojm showed us another way, the ultimate sacrifice. He killed himself to draw the attention of the Allies to the story they would not hear—of the persecution of the Jews in Europe. Perhaps the best example for me is that of the Austrian peasant Franz Jagersdatter. He was a father of three, a farmer, basically unlettered, who had all the excuses he needed to simply follow what the authorities asked him to do but wouldn't wear the uniform emblematic of support for Hitler. His parish priest told him that he should, his bishop told him he should, and his response was "Why does every man have a conscience?" That was so profound from a man who was just an authentic human being.

Generalgouvernement
Distrikt Krakau
Der Kreishauptmann in Przemyśl

Bekanntmachung.

Zur restlosen Durchführung der vom SS- und Polizeiführer im Distrikt Krakau angeordneten Judenaussiedlung gebe ich nochmals folgendes bekannt:

- 1) Jeder Pole oder Ukrainer, der einen Juden bei sich aufnimmt oder im Unterschlupf gewährt, bekleidet oder verarztet, wird erschossen.
- 2) Jeder Pole oder Ukrainer, der einem innerhalb des jüdischen Wohnbezirks weilenden Juden in irgendeiner Weise Unterstützung gewährt, wird erschossen.
- 3) Jeder Pole oder Ukrainer, der auch nur den Versuch einer der in 1) und 2) genannten Handlungen unternimmt, wird erschossen.
- 4) Gegen jeden Polen oder Ukrainer, der davon Kenntnis erhält, dass ein Jude sich unbefugt innerhalb eines jüdischen Wohnbezirks aufhält und der Polizei nicht Meldung erstattet, werden sicherheitspolizeiliche Massnahmen ergriffen.
- 5) Ich weise nochmals auf das Verbot hin, jüdisches Eigentum gegen Bezahlung oder sonstiglich zu erwerben bzw. in Vererbung zu nehmen. Zuwiderhandlungen gegen dieses Verbot werden strengstens bestraft.

ОПОВІСТКА.

Для цілковитого переведення виселення жидів, що його зарядив Керівник СС і Поліції в Дистрикті Краків, подаю до відома слідуюче:

- 1) Кожен український або польський громадянин, який приймає у себе жидів або дає йому схованку, кормить або утримує, буде розстріляний.
 - 2) Кожен український або польський, що в когось набуває або дає допомогу жидові, що перебуває поза визначеним жидівським районом, буде розстріляний.
 - 3) Кожен український або польський, який лише пробує зробити згаданого під 1) і 2), буде розстріляний.
 - 4) Проти кожного українського або польського, який приймає, що жидові надає схованку без належного дозволу властей, а не тільки при ньому, а також безпосередньо переслідує.
 - 5) Що раз кожен не тільки надає жидові допомогу, а також дає йому житло, їжу, одяг, гроші або безплатно їм, а також не переслідує.
- Протидіама проти цієї заборони будуть накладені на всіх.

Obwieszczenie.

Celem całkowitego przeprowadzenia zarządzanego przez Dowódcę SS i Policji w Dystrykcie Krakau wysiedlenia żydów podaję raz jeszcze do wiadomości:

- 1) Każdy Polek lub Ukraiński, który przyjmie do siebie żyda, ukryje, zapewni mu schronienie, nakarmi go oraz udzieli pomocy finansowej.
 - 2) Każdy Polek lub Ukraiński, który żydowi, przebywającemu poza określonym żydowskim rejonem, udzieli w jakikolwiek sposób pomocy materialnej lub finansowej.
 - 3) Każdy Polek lub Ukraiński, który próbuje żyda podjąć na tym, podległym pod 1) i 2) zarządzone przesiedlenie.
 - 4) Przeciw każdemu Polakowi lub Ukraińcowi, który posiada wiadomość, że jakiś żyd bez należącego pozwolenia przebywa poza określonym żydowskim rejonem i nie donosi właściwej Policji, zostaną podjęte działania policyjne.
 - 5) Zwracam jeszcze raz uwagę na to, że należy przestrzegać zakazu, aby żydów nie przyjmować, nie karmić, nie ubierać, nie dawać im pieniędzy.
- Przeciwdziałanie przeciwko temu zarządzeniu będzie jak najciężiej karane.

Przemyśl, dnia 19. 11. 1942.

PROCLAMATION

Regarding:
Aiding/keeping hidden Jews.

Be warned that in regard to Decree 3 regarding physical restrictions within the Generalgouvernement of 15 October, 1941 . . . Ordinance for G.G. (Gen. Government page 595) Jews leaving the Jewish zone without permission are subject to the penalty of death.

According to this decree individuals who knowingly provide shelter to such Jews, deliver food to them, or sell them food products, are likewise subject to the penalty of death.

The local non-Jewish population is hereby warned against:

- 1.) providing Jews with shelter,
- 2.) delivering them food,
- 3.) selling them food products.

The City Chief
Dr. Franke

Czestochowa, [Poland] 24.9.42

Translated from Polish by Adelle Chabelski

"RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS:" A TOOL FOR TEACHING MORAL DEVELOPMENT

by Efraim Zuroff¹

*Director of the Israel Office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center
and Coordinator of the Center's Nazi War Crimes Research*

One of the major issues facing Holocaust education today is its relevance for those who ostensibly have no personal connection to those historical events. Why should a typical American student evince any interest in events which transpired more than half a century ago in a faraway continent? For those whose families were not personally affected by these historical developments it would seem difficult to interest them in studying the Holocaust, especially in view of the horrors and atrocities which are such an important component of those events.

Under such circumstances, the subject of the Righteous Among the Nations, or of Righteous Gentiles, becomes particularly significant for three major reasons. Firstly, it provides a relevant approach to the study of extremely important historical material which might be of little interest to the average young American. Secondly, it affords us an opportunity to learn about complex historical events through the actions of a single individual, actions which are usually far more comprehensible and easier to relate to. The third reason concerns the emotional difficulty of studying the Holocaust. The personal story of an individual who has risked his or her life to save Jews from annihilation, conveys a positive message of hope which makes the enormity of the tragedy far more palatable.

This is especially true because the focal point of any evaluation of the deeds of the Righteous is naturally the manner in which this person confronted the crimes. The events of the Holocaust can be portrayed as a universal confrontation between Good and Evil, the ultimate test of humanity in time of crisis. The heart of the matter is our evaluation of human behavior as we compare and contrast the deeds of the Righteous with those of the perpetrators. Doing so on a personal level helps transmit the message we are trying to send regarding human responsibility for historical events.

In that context, the most important concept which the study of the Holocaust should convey is that the crimes carried out were committed by human beings, just as the Righteous, whose noble deeds we seek to honor, were also human beings. This leads us to the conclusion, extremely important in educational terms, that at least in theory every criminal could have responded as did the Righteous Among the Nations and, horrifyingly enough, vice versa. The Holocaust was the result of human actions, not preordained destiny. In other words, the Holocaust did not have to happen. It could, in fact, have been prevented, or at least reduced in scope, if more people had refused to carry out the murder of the Jews or to collaborate with those involved in such atrocities.

In her superb study of Franz Stangl, the Nazi commandant of the Treblinka and Sobibor death camps (*Into That Darkness* ²), author Gitta Sereny concludes that if Stangl's wife had left him when she found out what was happening in the camps he most likely would have resigned his position. This startling revelation underscores the human component of the crimes of the Holocaust. In the same manner, the deeds of Raoul Wallenberg ³, Joop Westerweel ⁴ or Oskar Schindler ⁵ must be studied with emphasis on the human dimension of choice and of the freedom to act.

In that respect it is particularly illuminating to compare the actions of a criminal and of a Righteous Gentile who responded to the exact same events but in diametrically opposite ways. Contrast, for example, the behavior of Plaszow concentration camp commander Amon Goeth, who took particular delight in the murder of "his" inmates, with that of Oskar Schindler who worked day and night to rescue the Jews incarcerated in Plaszow. Examined through the deeds of an individual perpetrator and an individual rescuer, the events in that concentration camp can be understood as a microcosm of the moral dilemmas posed by the Holocaust.

Portrayed in such terms, the dilemmas which confronted the people in Europe at that time can be more easily understood. The same comparisons can be made between two or more persons from the same city or locale who responded differently to the murder of the Jews. In the Lithuanian city of Kaunas (Kovno), for example, you can contrast the activities of Dr. Petras Baublys ⁶, who rescued Jewish children from the local ghetto, with those of Major Antanas Impulevicius ⁷ who headed a police unit which murdered approximately 50,000 Jews in Lithuania and Byelorussia. Ironically, both thought that they were fulfilling their patriotic duty as good Lithuanians, yet the former was inspired by humane values while the latter was motivated by chauvinistic antisemitism. In Latvia, one could contrast the actions of Janis Lipke ⁸, who personally rescued more than 40 Jews from the Riga ghetto, with those of Major Viktor Arajs ⁹ whose collaborationist Kommando (which bore his own name) actively participated in the liquidation of that Jewish community and many others.

In this context it is also important to remember that the dilemmas faced by the individual in Europe were also faced on a collective level. Countries were forced to determine policy on the

Jewish question and decide whether to cooperate with the Nazis. This situation applied equally to those states allied with Nazi Germany, such as Italy, as well as to satellites such as Croatia, Rumania and Slovakia, and such occupied countries as Poland and the Baltics. It also applied to neutrals, such as Sweden and Switzerland, and even to the Allies who had to decide to what extent to oppose Nazi Germany's anti-Jewish policies and what, if any measures, they should take to specifically assist the Nazi victims.

In certain instances even these issues, existing at the highest level of national policy, can be transmitted effectively through the personal stories of the Righteous Among the Nations. The dilemma facing the neutral Swiss is illustrated beautifully by the story of police commander Paul Gruninger who headed the police in the border canton of St. Gall and knowingly disobeyed orders to keep out refugees, thereby leading to the rescue of thousands of persecuted Jews. His subsequent dismissal from his job for insubordination clearly reflects, in this instance, a heartless attitude of the Swiss government to the plight of the victims of Nazi oppression. Gruninger's activities can be contrasted with those of Swiss police chief Heinrich Rothmund, upon whose initiative the Nazis stamped the passports of Jews with the letter "J" so that they could not escape to Switzerland undetected.

Finally, the stories of the Righteous Among the Nations can be used not only to make the history of the Holocaust relevant to American students today, but, more importantly, they facilitate the transmission of educational lessons which are the heart and soul of Holocaust education.

In that respect, the deeds of the Righteous not only led to the rescue of innocent lives but continue to resonate and help make the world a far better place, which ultimately is the goal of our educational efforts.

A word of caution is in order. While it is an extremely effective educational tool to compare the Righteous Among the Nations with Nazi war criminals, it is important never to lose sight of the enormous numerical disparity between the two groups. In fact, it is a highly important component of the lesson we seek to impart—that indeed every individual living in Europe at that time had freedom of action and could choose between good, apathy and evil. Yet the Holocaust ultimately took place because the number of perpetrators far surpassed the number of Righteous Among the Nations. And that is why tragedies happen and continue to happen to this day.

ENDNOTES

¹ Director of the Israel office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and coordinator of the Center's Nazi war crimes research, Efraim Zuroff has played an active role in the efforts to prosecute Nazi war criminals all over the world and has written extensively about Nazi criminality. In the course of the past 15 years he discovered the postwar escape to Western democracies of thousands of Nazi war criminals and collaborators and helped convince various govern-

ments such as Canada, Australia and Great Britain to pass special legislation enabling their prosecution in those countries. Zuroff exposed the granting of rehabilitation to numerous Nazi war criminals in newly-independent Lithuania and currently serves as a member of the joint Israeli-Lithuanian commission of inquiry established by the two governments to investigate these cases.

His book *Occupation: Nazi-Hunter: The Continuing Search for Perpetrators of the Holocaust* (Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV, 1994) deals with the moral significance of the belated efforts to prosecute the Nazi war criminals living in Western democracies and gives a detailed account of recent attempts to achieve justice in numerous countries. It is based on his work as a researcher in Israel for the Office of Special Investigations of the U.S. Justice Department (1980-1986) as well as his activities as coordinator of Nazi war crimes research for the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

Zuroff obtained his M.A. in Holocaust studies from the Institute of Contemporary Jewry of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and is currently completing his doctorate at the Institute. The co-editor (with Yisrael Gutman) of *Rescue Attempts During the Holocaust* (Yad Vashem, 1977), Zuroff has also published numerous scientific articles on issues relating to the rescue of Jews during World War II and the response of American Jewry during the Holocaust.

² Gita Sereny *Into That Darkness: From Mercy Killing to Mass Murder* New York: Mc Graw-Hill, 1983.

³ Mordecai Paldiel, *The Path of The Righteous, Gentile Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV, 1993, pp. 304, 317, 319-324.

⁴ Paldiel, pp. 144-146.

⁵ Paldiel, pp. 167-169.

⁶ A pediatrician by profession, Dr. Peter Baublys (died 1974) was the director of an orphanage in Kaunas (Kovno) Lithuania during World War II. Contacted by the Jewish underground in that city, he agreed to use the orphanage as a temporary shelter and a headquarters for the placement of Jewish children in safe hiding places. Dozens of children were taken into the orphanage for this purpose; others were left on its doorstep by desperate Jewish parents. Throughout the period of the Nazi occupation, Dr. Baublys provided free medical care for the Jewish children whom he placed with Lithuanian families.

Dr. Baublys, his brother Sergejus and his sister Jadvega (who hid a Jewish child in their home) were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations in 1977.

(Source: entry on Petras Baublys in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* New York, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 151-152.)

⁷ Major Antanas Impulevicius (1907-1971), a major in the Lithuanian Army during the period of Lithuanian independence, served as deputy commander of the 1st Auxiliary Lithuanian Police Battalion and (from August 9, 1941) as Commander of the 2nd (also referred to as the 12th) Lithuanian Auxiliary Police Battalion during the Nazi occupation. Both units played an active role in the persecution and murder of Jews and other civilians, but the latter was

notorious for its cruelty and the extensive scope of its murderous activities. According to recent research, the unit is estimated to have participated in the murder of approximately 46,000 people in Byelorussia during the fall and winter of 1941-42, as well as additional thousands in Forts IV and VII in Kaunas, Lithuania in the summer of 1941.

Impulvecius escaped from Nazi-occupied territory toward the end of World War II and subsequently emigrated to the United States posing as an innocent refugee. In 1962 he was tried in absentia and sentenced to death in Soviet Lithuania, but he was never extradited and died in the United States in 1971, having obtained American citizenship in 1964. Many of the men in his unit escaped to Western democracies such as Canada, Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand where they were uncovered by the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Charges have already been filed by the Office of Special Investigations of the U.S. Justice Department against more than ten of these individuals living in the United States, and several have already been denaturalized and/or deported to other countries.

(Sources: *Documents Accuse*, Vilnius, 1970; *Report of the Investigations of War Criminals in Australia*, Sydney, 1993, pp. 124-134, Efraim Zuroff, *Occupation: Nazi Hunter, the Continuing Search for the Perpetrators of the Holocaust*, Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV, 1994.)

⁸ Paldiel, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-262.

⁹ Major Viktor Arajs (1910-1988). A police officer during the period of Latvian independence, Arajs headed a commando unit of Latvian volunteers, which bore his name, during World War II. This unit which eventually numbered 900 men, played a key role in the persecution and murder of Jews and other civilians throughout Latvia and Byelorussia during the years 1941-1943. A lawyer by education, Arajs led a unit which functioned as a murder squad, shooting to death at least 30,000 persons and assisting in the execution of some 75,000 others, mostly Jews.

At the end of the war, Arajs was in Germany, where he was investigated and released by the British, who even employed him as a driver. He later assumed his wife's maiden name and continued to live together with her in various places in Germany, most recently in Frankfurt where he was arrested in 1975. Put on trial for murder on July 7, 1976, he was convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment on December 21, 1979. He died in prison in January, 1988.

Many of those who served in the Arajs Kommando escaped to Western democracies after World War II, especially to the United States, Canada, Australia and Great Britain. In several cases the U.S. government has denaturalized and/or deported such individuals but the others remain unprosecuted due to a lack of government action.

(Sources: Andrew Ezergailis, "Sonverkommando Arajs," a paper delivered at the 9th International Conference on Baltic studies in Stockholm, June 3-4, 1987; *Report of the Investigations of War Criminals in Australia*, Sydney, 1993, pp. 107-110, Efraim Zuroff, *Occupation: Nazi-Hunter, The Continuing Search for Perpetrators of the Holocaust*, Hoboken, New Jersey: KTAV, 1994.)



Swedish Schutz-Pass to protect Jews in Hungary from deportation. Swedish legation issued protective passports. Those who held these passes were promised by the Hungarian authorities that they would not be deported and would be permitted to live in protected houses. Raoul Wallenberg issued these passes while he served as a diplomat in Hungary.

COURTESY OF THE SIMON WEISenthal CENTER, LOS ANGELES, CA

SEMPO SUGIHARA, WHO DARED TO SAVE LIVES

Mordecai Paldiel, Ph.D.

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In recent years, a full half century after World War II, a growing number of people in Japan have become interested in, indeed almost hypnotized by, the story of Sempo Sugihara, the only Japanese to be honored with Yad Vashem's title "Righteous Among the Nations." Who was he and why this sudden delayed interest in him by the men and women of his own country?

A diplomat by profession, Sugihara was assigned by his Foreign Ministry in the fall of 1939 to open a Japanese consulate (office) in Kaunas, the then capital of independent Lithuania. Upon arrival at his new post, Sugihara learned the true purpose of his placement in that distant city, to report on German troop movements across the border, in anticipation of an expected German invasion of the Soviet Union.

Knowing the approximate invasion date would help military planning in Japan and allow troops to be shuffled to areas considered favorable by the military, especially in the southern Pacific region, which was Japan's main sphere of interest.

One year later, in summer 1940, Sugihara and all other foreign representatives in Kaunas were ordered to close their legations (offices) on orders of the new Soviet masters who had taken control of the country in the summer of that year. Obeying these instructions, Sugihara left Kaunas for Germany on the August 31 deadline and was reassigned, first to the Japanese legation in Koenigsberg, then to Romania, where he remained for the duration of the war. But before he left Kaunas, an unexpected incident changed the lives of several thousand stranded Jews and strongly affected Sugihara's self-assessment as a good-will messenger.

It happened one morning in the early part of August 1940. As he was busy packing and winding up operations in Kaunas, Sugihara was surprised by an unexpected commotion outside the Japanese legation. He sent his Polish-speaking secretary to find out what the people outside wanted. He returned with the following message, orally presented to him: "We are Jews. We have lived in

Poland, but we will be killed if we are caught by Nazi Germany. However, we don't have any visas [travel permits] to escape. We want you to issue Japanese visas."

Until that moment, Sugihara had been unaware of the dangerous position of the Jews in the unfolding European conflict and did not pay much attention to the frenzied antisemitism which gripped Germany, the country allied to his. His interest was limited to the conduct of the war and his concern that Japan gain the most advantage from this new global contest as it had done during the First World War. Yet a human cord awakened in him at this confrontation with these helpless people. Something deep inside him told him he could not dismiss their plea out of hand. To get a clearer picture of their demands, he agreed to meet a delegation. As he described it later, he was moved by the pleas of these people who, with tears in their eyes, begged for Japanese transit visas in order to be able to proceed to other destinations via Japan. Most hoped eventually to reach Latin American countries, the United States (Japan was then not yet at war), and perhaps the Promised Land of Israel.

As later told by Dr. Zerach Warhaftig, who eventually served as a Minister in the Israeli government, seeing the Japanese consul-general was an important and fateful event for thousands of Jews. Many were rabbinical students who had fled Poland during the German invasion of September 1939 and were now stranded in Lithuania. Uncomfortably boxed in between two superpowers bracing their armies for an eventual confrontation with each other, Lithuania seemed at best only a brief asylum for these people. They were concerned that the host country would soon be overrun in a war between Germany and Russia. The country's independence was at best uncertain and by the summer of 1940 had come under the full sway of the Soviets. The Germans, most suspected, had designs on that Baltic country, and the rise of pro-German and antisemitic sentiments among large segments of the population was not a good sign for the Jewish community. It was high time to look for a way out before the storm broke.

Quite by chance, two rabbinical students from Holland, who had come to Poland to complete their studies and were now stranded in Lithuania, learned during a visit to the Dutch consulate, that no visa was required for entry to Curaçao, one of the Dutch-controlled Caribbean islands. They were told that the Dutch island governor had the authority to decide when a person landed whether to allow the person to stay on or not. In other words, an individual could seek asylum on that distant island, without having an entry visa beforehand, an unheard-of privilege in those days, since a decision on a person's stay would be decided *ex post facto*—after the person's arrival. Moreover, the Dutch consul in Kaunas was prepared to confirm this procedure by writing it in the form of an official statement with the Dutch seal added, which could serve as a substitute visa.

When Warhaftig and his friends (ever on the lookout for exit loopholes) learned of this opportunity, they decided to study it further by exploring the possibility of getting transit visas through countries lying along the route to that faraway island no one knew much about. German

control of most of Europe in August 1940 ruled out any travel in that direction. The only possible way was through the Soviet Union by heading either south to Turkey or eastward toward Japan and China.

The Soviet authorities in Lithuania, however, declined to grant transit visas through their territory unless the refugees could produce additional visas for countries bordering the USSR. This added Soviet condition and another glance at the map led Warhaftig and his friends to the Japanese consulate. They gambled on being able to sway the Japanese consul general to grant them a Japanese transit visa, as a means of getting a similar Soviet one—thanks to which they would be able to get away from Lithuania.

As Warhaftig matter-of-factly relates, he spread out a map and told the surprised Sugihara: "You see, we have a visa to Curaçao.... We must reach Curaçao via Japan and sail on a Japanese boat Give us a transit visa to travel through Japan."

The career diplomat Sugihara was frankly upset by this highly irregular request, but a hidden humanitarian streak in his soul mysteriously drew him to these defenseless people. At the end of the meeting, he asked them to return in a few days to give him time to check the matter with his superiors in Tokyo. Leaving, Warhaftig had no idea whether Curaçao scheme would pay off.

Sugihara immediately set to work. A brief check with the local Soviet authorities confirmed what Warhaftig said about the additional transit visa requirement for travel through Soviet territory. Sugihara then cabled Tokyo a brief message: "Is it all right to issue visas to Jews?" After receiving a negative response, he sent another cable but received no answer. When a third cable remained unanswered, Sugihara decided to wait no longer. There were only a few days left until his forced departure from Kaunas, and Sugihara felt he had to act quickly if he were to be of help to the stranded refugees.

Recalling these dramatic August days years later, Sugihara reveals something of the extremely painful sleepless nights which tormented his mind:

I really had a hard time, being unable to sleep for two nights. I thought as follows: I can issue transit visas... by virtue of my authority as consul. I cannot allow these people to die, people who have come to me for help with death staring them in the eyes. Whatever punishment may be imposed upon me (for disobeying government instructions), I know I should follow my conscience.

Sugihara then decided to act:

Approximately on August 10th, I decided there was no further point to continue negotiating with Tokyo. The following day I began, on my own accord and with full responsibility on my part, to issue Japanese transit visas to the refugees without regard whether so-and-so had the necessary documents or not.

When the Japanese Foreign Ministry learned that Sugihara had not followed orders, they cabled him new instructions to stop issuing visas, "but I fully disregarded these cables," Sugihara proudly recalls, adding that he was acting out of purely humanitarian considerations. "I had no doubt that one day I would be fired from my work in the Foreign Ministry I continued to issue Japanese transit visas to Polish(Jewish) refugees until I left Kaunas on August 31st."

Sugihara estimates he issued some 3,500 transit visas(Warhaftig believes it was closer to the 1,600 mark). In order to achieve this (with time running out), he worked without letup for 12 straight days and even enlisted the help of several rabbinical students to put the Japanese seal on many passports and documents. According to one source, Sugihara even issued visas from the compartment of the train which was about to take him out of the country.

Those who accepted Sugihara's aid were spared the savage destruction of the Holocaust which came upon Lithuania like a thunderstorm in June 1941, with the German invasion of Russia. Curiously, none of them ever reached Curaçao. After a brief stay in Japan, most were able to continue to Shanghai and then to the United States, Canada, and Palestine.¹

Two years after the war's end, Sugihara returned to Tokyo, to be handled a dismissal notice by the new Minister of Foreign Affairs. Foreign Ministry officials referred to Sugihara's "neglect of instructions" in the Jewish refugees affairs seven years previously as the underlying reason for his dismissal. The armchair officials in Tokyo, still at their jobs in spite of Japan's defeat, had not forgotten, nor forgiven.

After his dismissal, Sugihara found odd jobs. Moving from job to job, he managed to eke out a living to support his family. For a time, he worked as a purchasing agent for the United States Army, then, as a translator for the Japanese Broadcasting Authority and for private companies. In 1961, he established himself in Moscow as a sales representative for a Japanese exporting firm. As the years wore on, the story of his courageous war-time deed gained wider audiences, but mostly outside his own country.

In 1985, while he was bedridden, his wife represented him in a ceremony hosted by the Israeli ambassador in Tokyo and widely reported in the Japanese press in which he was awarded Yad Vashem's Righteous medal and a certificate of honor bearing his name. Several months latter, a

tree in Sugihara's name was added to those in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. He died peacefully that same year.

More recently, a memorial bearing Sugihara's name was erected in his home town Yaotsu, on a cliff renamed "Hill of Humanity." In Israel, the Jewish National Fund named a forest after him near Bet Shemesh. A growing number of Japanese have taken a belated interest in the man. Books and articles have appeared hailing the sole Japanese humanitarian honored by Israel; and educators, using Sugihara's example, are now pondering the difficult question of a civil servant's disobedience to his government when its action run counter to human rules of conduct and morality. It seems that Sugihara's story has touched a sensitive chord in a country where society's rules and norms(not the individual's) are still considered the final authority in questions of moral conduct. Time will tell what effect this man will have on his country. In the meantime, his popularity is on the rise in Japan.²

ENDNOTES

¹ In a 1965 meeting between the former Dutch governor of Curaçao and Minister Warhaftig, the governor provided an interesting, if somewhat chilling insight of the insensitivity's of Western leaders to the plight of the Jews. To Warhaftig's inquiry whether he would have allowed the refugees to remain on the island, the former governor replied: "Not at all! I would have expelled the boat out to the sea as the U.S.A. and Cuba did to the ship St. Louis."

² File 2861, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem; Department for the Righteous

NUMBERS OF "RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS"

YAD VASHEM

The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority
Righteous Among The Nations — Per Country & Ethnic Origin (1)

Poland	4,613	Switzerland	19
Holland	3,805	Bulgaria	13
France	1,306	Denmark (2)	12
Belgium	735	England	9
Ukraine	578	Sweden	7
Germany	299	Moldavia	5
Czech & Slovakia	307	Norway (2)	6
Hungary	313	Spain	3
Lithuania	289	Armenia	3
Italy	178	Luxemburg	2
Greece	181	U.S.A.	1
Yugoslavia (all regions)	147	Estonia	1
Russia/Belarus	162	Brazil	1
Austria	78	Portugal	1
Albania	50	Japan	1
Romania	46	Turkey	1
Latvia	51	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>13,223</u>

(1) These figures are based solely on material made available to Yad Vashem and are in no way to be construed as reflecting the actual number of Jews saved in each country. For instance, more Jews were rescued in Belgium than in Holland, yet we have six times as many persons for Holland as we do for Belgium. The same is true for Italy in relation to Poland. On the other hand, although less Jews were saved in Poland and the Netherlands than in other countries, rescue possibilities were more difficult in these two countries than elsewhere in Eastern and Western Europe.

(2) The Underground movements in Denmark and Norway played a major role in the rescue of the Jews in their communities. These two organizations have asked that no individual names be divulged.

Figures are current for 31.7.95

Mordechai Paldiel, Ph.D.

August 27, 1995

KEEPING THE RESCUERS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

by Alex Grobman, Ph.D.

"Stories about Christian rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust threaten to erase from our collective memory the epidemic outbreak of gross cruelty that accompanied the advance of the Nazi terror machine . . ." declared Fanya Gottesfeld Heller, a survivor of the Holocaust, in a letter to *The New York Times*. Although she had been saved by righteous Christians, she is distressed that "not only the guilty . . . prefer anointing the heroes to condemning the villains," but "an entire generation of Jewish youth, secure in their own society, wants desperately to be assured that the killers, rather than the rescuers, were the aberration."¹

Ms. Heller is not alone in her concerns about the danger of inflating the historical importance of the rescuers. Other survivors and historians share her apprehensions and with some justification. At a conference titled "The Holocaust in Southern Europe," sponsored by the National Italian Foundation and held at the New York University Law School, the organizers did not focus on the role that Italian fascism might have played in creating fertile ground for the rise of Nazi ideology in Germany or the attempts to annihilate the Jews in Southern Europe. Instead, the organizers stressed the decent behavior of Italian citizens, diplomats, and soldiers who sheltered and protected Jews in Italy and elsewhere until 1943, when the Nazis occupied northern and central Italy.

The New York Times reported that a woman at the conference asked why had it taken 50 years before the "true story" about Italy's behavior during the war had come to light. Somehow, these vignettes about Italians, who acted according to their conscience and religious beliefs, negated the role Italy played during the rest of the war. Another member of the audience, apparently oblivious to the silence of the Vatican on the destruction of the Jews of Europe, stated that whenever the Vatican attempted to help the Jews, conditions became worse for the Church. And yet, this individual wanted to know when the "true story" about the heroic efforts of the Christian convents, clergy, and schools to protect Jews would be told.

Two additional examples will provide further illustration of the moral confusion and distor-

tion of history that this issue has caused. Susan Zuccotti, a professor of history at Barnard College and author of *The Holocaust, the French and the Jews*, concludes that given the virulent antisemitism raging in France during the war, the French should be commended for the "generosity, tolerance, and fundamental humanity" that enabled 76 percent, or 250,000 French Jews, to survive.

At the trial in France of Paul Touvier, an official in the Vichy secret police charged with crimes against humanity, the defense attempted to resort to the "Schindler defense." Touvier asserted that the Gestapo had demanded that he execute 100 Jews, but he agreed to killing just 30. Since he had only seven Jews executed near Lyon, Touvier claimed that he had actually saved 23 Jews. The court rejected his claim and convicted him.

Under the circumstances, we can understand why Raul Hilberg, a Holocaust historian, sees the emphasis on rescue as misleading. For him, "there is *nothing* to be taken from the Holocaust that imbues anyone with hope or any thought of redemption, but the need for heroes is so strong that we'll manufacture them."²

The danger of distorting the history of the Holocaust—of not focusing on the major themes of abandonment, passivity, and complicity is very real—but some distortion is inevitable no matter what we do. As long as we understand that the efforts of the rescuers are a small part of the picture, we have an obligation to tell what these people did. For Jews, our tradition requires *hakarot hatov*, the recognition of good deeds.

There is another issue as well. "Racial and religious hatred is a luxury in which no nation or group can indulge without the danger of setting its own house on fire. It is like playing with dynamite or even worse!—with hydrogen bombs," warned Father John O'Brien of the University of Notre Dame. "The insensate fury which such hatred releases comes back to purge and bestialize the hater: it degrades, demoralizes, and dehumanizes him as no external enemy can possibly do."

The rescuers show us that one individual can make a difference, and "that we are all traveling in the same boat. The occupant who drives a hole under the part where his neighbor is seated, finds that the water engulfs him as well and carries him to destruction."³ Our challenge is to keep these stories in perspective without losing sight of the entire history of the Holocaust. We owe that to the rescuers and to those who perished.

ENDNOTES

¹ "Holocaust Rescuers Were Rare Exceptions," *The New York Times*, July 9, 1994, p. 18.

² "Good Germans, Honoring the Heroes And Hiding the Holocaust," *The New York Times*, June 12, 1994, pp. 1 and 6.

³ Philip Friedman, *Their Brothers' Keepers*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1957, pp. 10-11.

NEW INSIGHTS ON HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS AND THEIR HELPERS

by Drs. Dienke Hondius*



Drs. Hondius, a historian who specializes in the history of antisemitism during and after the Holocaust, has worked since 1984 at the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, where she prepares exhibitions and educational materials. She is currently preparing a dissertation on the history of tolerance toward religious and ethnic minorities in the Netherlands since 1945. Her article points to some of the complexities of the personal relationships that existed between the Jews and those who helped them survive the Holocaust. The problems she raises about these relationships were found in a minority of cases but are being discussed here to provide balance and perspective on the subject.

Those Europeans who helped hide Jews from the Nazis during the Holocaust were ordinary women and men who proved to be unique individuals by making a crucial choice at one point in their lives. Most of the assistance they provided was individual and somewhat irregular, involving personal decisions and choices that generally could not be shared with anyone else. Since 1945 these helpers have not formed new groups or organized themselves on the basis of having helped Jews. They remain a very loose collection of individuals as they did before, during, and after the war.

We will probably never know the exact number of helpers. Only surviving Jews or their relatives can initiate the request to honor a helper. If a Jew was killed or lost contact with his or her helper after the war, there is little possibility that the helper will ever be recognized. The same is true for those who helped Jews and were deported and then murdered. These people took the same risks, yet there is no one to verify their involvement. Jews who helped their fellow Jews are another group that probably will never be recognized as helpers, since Yad Vashem does not give an award to Jews.

The department of the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem in Israel has been the first and the most consistent organization in recognizing those who helped Jews. Currently more than 13,000 people have received this well-known award. Despite very strict criteria, each year 80 to 100 Dutch citizens are given this award.

As Dr. Mordecai Paldiel, head of the Righteous Among the Nations Department at Yad Vashem, noted in 1994 that the numbers of those who helped Jews have been "based solely on material made available to Yad Vashem and are in no way to be construed as reflecting the actual number of Jews saved in each country. For instance," he explained, "more Jews were rescued in Belgium than in Holland, yet we have six times as many persons for Holland as we do for Belgium, the same for Italy with relation to Poland. On the other hand, although fewer Jews were saved in Poland and the Netherlands than in other countries, the rescue possibilities were more difficult in these two countries than elsewhere in Eastern and Western Europe." Although the underground movements in Denmark and Norway "played a major role in the rescue of the Jews in their communities," Paldiel added, speakers for these two movements have asked that no individual names be made known.

Jews were hidden in many different places, usually for very short periods of time. Help included small gestures, such as providing directions, offering shelter for a night or two, assisting in crossing a border or passing through a town, or supplying food and drink. It is important to consider this wide range of activities when trying to develop a broad personal view about helping during the Holocaust or when trying to teach young people about it. Saving a life could require the involvement of many different people and many hiding places. There were many small but decisive moments and choices. Rarely could people foresee the outcome of their actions; survival was often a matter of luck. Despite all of these various factors, one should keep in mind that, for the most part, Jews initiated the request to be sheltered.

With the increasing public and political awareness of the importance of the Holocaust, the helpers' image has changed over the past ten years. Several organizations have been established to find, honor, and financially support helpers. The mere fact that some people helped the persecuted is regarded by many as a little bit of light in the darkness.

In the United States, during the last several years much attention has been given to the word "rescuers" which is becoming a preferred term, but I prefer "helper" because rescue involved a significant amount of help and not every helper could rescue the people they tried to save. Part of the reason for the increased interest worldwide is the need for hope and for good news. Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis made this point in strong terms: "The world is hungry for moral heroes. The world needs heroes whose altruism is lived out in action, models of exemplary behavior who realize our abstract ideals, human beings to be emulated. . . ." This hunger for hope, heroes, and light in place of darkness is clear, but it is not certain whether you can reasonably expect so much. There are clearly some pitfalls. Many rescuers express strong feelings of uneasiness and hesitation toward their new status as award-winning, unique individuals, as saints almost.

Rescuers who are honored by Yad Vashem often hesitate (and sometimes absolutely) to come forward, to stand in the limelight, to be called a hero: they have to be coaxed to. Yet recog-

nition may also be important to them. This uneasiness is significant. To be convincing, heroism and sacrifice must be permanently accompanied by modesty. This is an almost impossible task for any idol, public hero, or media star—to be special and yet to remain a modest and ordinary human being. Yet that is precisely what is expected of helpers in the Netherlands. Many helpers refuse being seen as heroes; instead, they point to their ordinary nature. How are we to understand this behavior? Are helpers exaggerating their modesty?

Rescuers seldom speak about nonrescuers, but it is logical to assume that they feel strongly that the others could have done more to help. And they are probably right. This might be a good starting point in teaching young people about it: that helping was difficult, but not impossible.

A comparison with more ordinary examples of helping, such as fire fighters or life savers on the beach, might be useful, even though we recognize different risks and circumstances. With little training, courage, and awareness of the situation, almost anyone can do something and make a difference. You do not have to be a super human being, a moral hero, or a saint to help someone.

The search for moral heroes and saints inevitably leads to disappointment. How can the helpers live up to this image of moral heroes attributed to them during the last decade? With all the praise, honors, and publicity, public expectations have arisen enormously, and the helpers have reason to be uncomfortable and afraid that they may disappoint others, that they may not be able to sustain this image. Regarded more and more as a moral example for humanity, honored helpers feel that for the rest of their lives they are not allowed to make mistakes.

In my view, it is time to recognize more of the *ordinariness* of the rescuers, something they themselves have pointed to but which has usually been waved aside by others as extreme modesty. Let us try to balance the perspective and put the helpers' behavior in the context of its time. The few who provided hiding places for Jews, who sheltered adults or children for a night or for years, who were prepared to open their doors and change their daily routines to help others are indeed a small group. Where noninvolvement was the rule and the most common reaction, the helpers were indeed special, unique individuals who took a risk and by doing so made a crucial choice. In the words of Holocaust historian Raul Hilberg: "In the course of the onslaught on European Jewry, some people in the non-Jewish population helped their Jewish neighbors, many more did or obtained something at the expense of the Jews, and countless others watched what had come to pass."²

Some stories of helpers are excellent for teaching about the Holocaust, for providing insight into the different choices that could be made and different attitudes that could be taken even in very difficult circumstances.

The following universal themes in these personal histories are worth considering and dis-

cussing (both for educational purposes and for further research) in view of the light then cast on human nature:

- The difference between what people say and what they do or the difference between attitudes and behavior. For example, it was possible to hold onto anti-Jewish stereotypes and yet still help Jews survive. On the other hand, there were many people active in resistance organizations who never came to regard the persecution of the Jews as a major priority.

- The question of risk and fear involved in hiding and helping. Looking back, one can see clearly that the risks varied according to country and circumstance. At the time people made a decision to go into hiding or to help Jews in hiding, the risk was not at all clear to them. Fear is another intriguing phenomenon often used as a justification, in hindsight, for not getting involved in helping or in other resistance activities. Some people were able to overcome their fear, others appear to have given in to their fears more easily. It also seems that time changes the memory of fear. In retrospect, fear can be exaggerated or denied.

- The importance of silence and secrecy in hiding and helping. In all resistance it was important to work in silence, to keep a secret and not tell even close relatives or friends about these activities. This is one of the points stressed by Miep and Jan Gies, who helped Anne Frank and her family hide from the Nazis and their collaborators. Miep is one of the very few helpers who has published her own impressive memoirs. It is significant that she gave her permission for publication only after much hesitation, not for herself but because many others requested her to do so.³

Care must be taken not to glorify the image of the helpers too much. The more ordinary, banal, and even objectionable aspects of the lives of these same people should not be forgotten. However crucial the involvement, helping was, after all, just a moment, a short period in the lives of the helpers; it does not tell everything about their lives or personalities. We must allow for the full complexity and the contradictions in the personal stories of helpers. We know, for example, that some people helped Jews in hiding while continuing to believe in antisemitic stereotypes. Others helped Jewish children survive in hiding, taking enormous risks, and yet at the same time were not able to keep their hands off these children and young Jewish women, putting them under pressure and yet caring for them so that they survived. It has taken the survivors a long time to reveal these more difficult memories of their hiding experiences.⁴

Only very recently, as hidden children have begun to meet and share experiences, have more of these negative stories of their total dependence on their helpers and the misuse of trust by them emerged.

These trying memories have a sobering effect on the romanticized and one-sided image of heroism and sacrifice of the helpers and on the lifelong gratitude of the survivors. This heroic image

had a firm grip on Holocaust memory for decades. Now other areas, sometimes painful and shocking, are slowly being revealed, forcing us to make a more sober assessment of the histories of hidden Jews and their helpers. Also, we now know that helpers sometimes had more negative feelings toward the Jews they hid, either during the war or afterward.

Those who teach the Holocaust should resist the temptation to generalize, dramatize, simplify, or glorify the stories of those who hid and those who helped them. Recognizing the difficult, different, and sometimes contradictory elements in personal histories of all groups in the Holocaust will raise more questions than easy answers, but such recognition will also result in a truer picture of what happened. This more realistic picture offers a different kind of perspective, for if these ordinary people could rise to the occasion and act in an exemplary manner when the times called for it, then possibly so could many others.

ENDNOTES

*The title Drs. is used in Europe to indicate that the individual has completed all of the work for a doctorate except the dissertation, which is in the process of being completed.

¹ Harold N. Schulweis, "The Bias Against Man, New Light on Rescue and Rescuers," *Dimensions*, vol. 3, no. 3, p. 8. New York: ADL, 1988.

² Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945*, New York: HarperCollins, 1992, p. 212.

³ Miep Gies, with Alison Leslie Gold, *Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of the Woman Who Helped to Hide the Frank Family*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988.

⁴ See, for example, Anita van Ommeren and Ageeth Scherphuis, "Deronderduikers in de Haarlemmerneer," *Vrij Nederland*, March 16, 1985, pp. 2-25. Amsterdam. For a series of in-depth interviews with Dutch Jewish women who experienced sexual harassment while in hiding, see Ziporah Valkhoff, *Leven in een niet-bestaan: Believing en betekenis van de joodse onderduik*, and also the excellent introduction to this book by Jolande Withuis, Icodo, Utrecht, 1993. See also an impressive collection of ten portraits of hidden children: Andre Stein, *Hidden Children: Forgotten Survivors of the Holocaust*. Toronto, 1993. Also, the memories of both hidden children and the people who hid them are analyzed in a moving study by Bloeme Evers-Emden, *Geleende Kinderen, Ervaringen vanonderduikouders en hun joodse beschermelingen inde jaren 1942 tot 1945*. Kok, Kampen, 1994.

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